

I Got a
CHEAT SKILL
in **ANOTHER**
WORLD and Became
UNRIVALED
in the **REAL**
WORLD,
Too

1

Miku

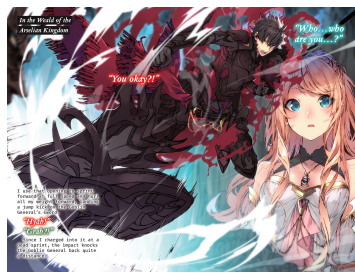
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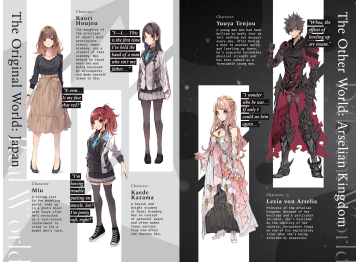




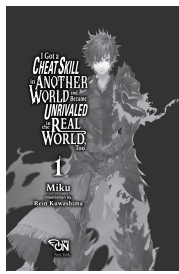












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ISEKAI DE CHEAT SKILL WO TE NI SHITA ORE WA, GENJITSU SEKAI WOMO MUSO SURU, Volume 1 ~LEVEL UP WA JINSEI WO KAETA~

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Prologue

I—Yuuya Tenjou—am a victim of bullying.

It's nothing new.

Even when I was little... Hell, from basically kindergarten onward, it was like I walked around with a target on my back.

Begging my tormentors to stop just amused them and made them bully me even more, and no matter how much I pleaded with my teachers, none of them ever listened.

Worse still, they started putting the blame squarely on my shoulders.

I might have been able to bear it if it was just the other kids at school or my teachers who treated me badly.

But my family has never loved me, either.

I'd like to think they showered me with affection when I was first born.

After all, I was their first child.

But that was all I was.

With each passing year, my face grew uglier and uglier no matter how much I wanted it to do otherwise.

Despite the fact that I never overate and always stuck to normal portions, my body put on more and more weight.

There were times when I tried to exercise only to find myself getting fatter still, making a mockery of my efforts.

Even though I never changed how much I ate.

Maybe I had some sort of illness.

Right around the time that thought crossed my mind...my parents completely lost any interest in me.

They had two new children—twins. A boy and a girl they showered with affection.

Neither looked anything like me, with their charming features, and my parents poured all of their love into them.

It also changed how they treated me.

The twins would get all the nice food, while I had to pick from day-old scraps.

Perhaps it was a blessing that I got any food at all, but my main source of nourishment during those years were leftovers and expired packaged stuff.

Even with something as basic as laundry, my parents refused to wash my clothes in the same load, claiming it would ruin their clothes. They eventually just stopped washing them altogether, saying it was waste of water.

As an elementary school kid, I was forced to use the public sink at the park to wash my clothes.

Incidentally, everything the twins wore was brand-new, while I made do with old hand-me-downs.

This even extended to backpacks. Only I had to go through all of school with worn and ragged backpacks.

The twins were a year younger than I was, and due to how my parents treated me, by the time I was going to kindergarten, I had to take care of most everything in my life on my own.

I always envied my brother and sister.

It's not like I ever did anything to deserve this... Or maybe I did deserve it because I didn't work hard enough to change it?

No matter how much I pleaded with them, my parents couldn't have cared less.

Because of that, even when I thought I had something physically wrong with me, they wouldn't even take me to the hospital.

I suppose I should consider myself lucky that I got food at all given the circumstances.

That said, I'm fairly certain it was mainly because my parents were worried about how it would look to society at large if they didn't feed me anything.

—Still, there was one person in my life who was kind to me.

Gramps—my late grandfather.

He rarely visited us because he was always off on one trip or another. I remember him bringing me back weird souvenirs from whatever place he'd been to last.

But whenever he was at home, he'd treat me, the ugly one, with love and care.

He never paid much attention to the twins. I was always the apple of his eye.

Gramps had always been something of a vagabond, constantly flying off to odd destinations. He had a reputation as an eccentric who collected strange trinkets, and my parents never liked him.

When I started elementary school, I'd visit him whenever he was at

home, since his house was nearby.

No matter how angrily Gramps objected to how others treated me, my ugliness and his peculiar habits meant all of his objections were ignored and swept under the rug.

And the only person who ever showed me an ounce of love... Well, he was dead.

“Yuuya, keep your chin up. There’s nothing to worry about. No matter how hard life might be, so long as you keep smiling, happiness will find you eventually. Someday, you’ll show everyone that they were wrong about you... Besides, you’ve got a long life ahead of you, Yuuya. Take your time, stay patient, and be true to yourself. It’ll be fine. I know you can do it, Yuuya.”

With those words, Gramps breathed his last.

He left his house and all of his wealth to me.

Of course, my parents tried to take them from me, but Gramps was one step ahead of them and had taken all the necessary precautions to foil their plans.

As a consequence, my parents completely abandoned any pretense of caring for me.

Well, I suppose in a certain sense, that was a completely natural outcome.

That’s why I moved out to live in the house Gramps had left me.

It wasn’t like he left me a huge inheritance, but my parents weren’t going to support me in any way, shape, or form.

Gramps left me enough money to pay for a six-year combined middle and high school, meaning I could at least finish studying.

I was able to cover the registration fees and tuition, but there wasn’t enough money left over for daily living expenses, so I had to balance school with various part-time jobs.

And as of this moment, I need to leave right now unless I want to be late for work. Unfortunately, I’ve just been dragged behind the school gym.

The only thing that could possibly await me there is—

“You got some nerve, lardass!”

“Guh?!”

—a savage beating.

A constant flurry of kicks and punches.

I struggle to breathe, and because I always skip lunch to save money, the only thing I hack up is bile.

After several minutes of this, they seem to grow tired of giving me a

thrashing so Takeshi Araki, the leader of the bullies, grabs me by the hair and drags my head up as I cough.

Araki is what you would call a stereotypical delinquent and he sports bleached hair and piercings in his ears.

He never wears his school uniform properly, and evidently, he's a member of a high school gang called the Red Ogres that's based in this area.

"Guh! *Hack!*"

"Stop coughing, fatty. You're supposed to be my punching bag. So tell me... Why exactly is a punching bag trying to leave on its own?"

"Oomph?!"

I feel the sharp impact of his knee meeting my face.

My nose is bleeding profusely, and my whole face throbs with pain.

"Hey now, Araki. Not in the face, eh? It's too easy to see."

"Eh, no one gives a shit about trash like him."

"Bwa-ha-ha-ha! This is hilarious!"

Several tacky-looking girls start snapping pictures of me on their phones.

After watching them for a moment, Araki's lips curled into a malicious grin, apparently happening upon a grand idea.

"Hey, I just thought of something fun. Since we're already taking pictures, let's get some nudes!"

"Oh! Yeah, great idea! Let's bring more people over."

"A'ight, send texts to everyone in your contacts."

"Ah?! W-wait..."

"Shut your mouth, asshole!"

"Guh!"

Another kick to the face.

I feel light-headed, as if I'm losing my grip on consciousness, but if I pass out here, there's no telling what they'll do to me.

But it's not as though I can do anything to resist, and it isn't long before the people Araki and his friends called over begin gathering around us.

"Oh, c'mon, you said there'd be something interesting..."

"*Sigh*... Now I have to look at this disgusting face."

I somehow manage to turn in the direction of the cold voices. An incredibly attractive boy and girl stare down at me with their oddly similar faces both twisted into matching scowls of annoyance.

—It's Youta Tenjou and Sora Tenjou...my younger brother and sister.

They're only a year younger than me, so I occasionally run into them at middle school. Every time they see me, they dismiss me with nothing but a scornful glance.

I'll be a first-year high school student in the spring, and they'll be

third-year middle school students, but I guess there isn't any way for me to avoid them in the long run.

Of course, there's no reason for them to be back here behind the gym, so it's probably safe to assume Araki or one of his cronies invited them.

"Eh? Youta, you know this pig?"

"Yes. While I hate to admit it...he's technically my older brother."

"Your big brother?! Oh, you've gotta be kidding me! Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! You look nothing alike!"

Araki stares at me before bursting into a fit of laughter.

"Well, we have nothing to do with him. We just happen to be related, legally speaking. Not that it matters."

"I see, I see... Well, whatever. At least enjoy yourself while you're here."

After that exchange, I notice that nearly twenty people have gathered. In the end, I'm powerless to do anything as Araki and his goons strip me.

I fight as hard as I can, and I even plead with them in desperation, but every time I object or resist, they silence me with another blow. Before long, I'm completely naked.

"Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

"Hey now, don't be shy!"

"Ugh, disgusting!"

I'm assailed by taunts and insults from the people around me. I bite down on my lip, bearing the scorn as best as I can.

I hear the sounds of cameras snapping shots for a while, before Araki raises his voice to address the crowd.

"Thanks for coming today, guys! Well, guess it's about time to call it a day!"

With that, Araki turns to me, and his teeth gleam in a predatory grin

"A'ight! Go fly, piggy!"

"Gah!"

I take a powerful blow to the jaw, which sends me flying like a rag doll. I lose consciousness as soon as I hit the ground.

When I come to, there's no one around, and the moon is high in the sky.

I check my belongings and find that all of my money has been stolen, my textbooks torn, and my clothes left in a puddle of mud.

"Ngh...sniff...sob..."

I try desperately to avoid breaking down, but I can't bear the pain, the humiliation.

...Gramps, what am I supposed to do...?

This is what passes for my daily life.

CHAPTER 1

To a Different World

Having endured the hell that is my daily existence, I am currently enjoying a brief moment of respite.

I've just graduated from middle school and am in the middle of the short spring break until my high school entrance ceremony.

Ordinarily, I'd be spending this break at my various part-time jobs, but I don't have any work at the moment.

It's all thanks to the beating Araki and his goons gave me.

I was fired from the job I was supposed to go to that day because I failed to show up without calling ahead, and I'd been let go from my other jobs because of the litany of injuries I'd suffered.

It isn't fair and it isn't right, but no matter how angry that makes me, there's nothing I can do about it.

Maybe I should try lifting weights over break? I can't imagine it'd make much of a difference.

There's still a lot I have to process, but more than anything, I need to find new jobs.

That being said, since I have nothing to do at the moment, I suppose I can use the time to clean the house.

With that thought, I take out some rags and the vacuum cleaner and begin a thorough cleaning of the house.

While I make a habit of tidying up as much as I can on a daily basis, it's surprising how dirty things can get without a deep clean.

Besides, Gramps's house is pretty large, so if I don't make a concerted effort like this every once in a while, there's a bunch of rooms that I don't really have a reason to go into or clean.

...No, I know the truth. I'm just trying to distract myself...

With dark thoughts clouding my mind, I bring the bucket I'm using to the sink and can't avoid seeing my own face in the mirror.

Beady little eyes. Small nostrils and a piglike nose. Even though I have clearly defined cheekbones, my face itself is bloated with fat and

covered with pimples and freckles.

Thick lips and crooked teeth.

Thinning hair, like I'm already balding.

This is my face.

It looks nothing like those of my parents or the twins.

I feel something rush out as I study my reflection in the mirror.

"Rah... Raaah... Raaaaaaaaaaaaagh!"

I repeatedly punch my reflection.

Out of desperation to erase the person in front of me, I rain blows on the glass even as I start bleeding from my knuckles.

Then I draw back the bucket and slam it into the mirror. It shatters easily under the assault.

"Huff...huff..."

I feel some of my calm return once the mirror is gone, but I can't shake the gloom that clouds my thoughts.

The floor is littered with glass shards and spatters of my blood.

...No matter how much I scream, it isn't going to change my current situation.

If it was an option, I'd get cosmetic surgery.

But seeing as how I have no money, that's not happening.

It's all I can do to just earn enough for my day-to-day living expenses.

My heart sinks as I grapple with the harshness of reality.

—Just what do I want to be?



I can't see a future for myself right now. I probably won't be able to get any decent jobs.

I've always been so preoccupied with surviving that I've never given any real thought to what I want to be in the future or what my dreams are.

A dream...dreams... There's no point hoping for anything, never mind dreaming of something bigger.

I don't have the strength or the will to make anything like that come true...

"Dammit!"

Despairing over my impotence, I slam my fist against the wall. That's when I notice something.

"Huh...?"

The wall is rotating like some sort of hidden door in a ninja house. An unfamiliar room appears before me.

"Wh...what the...?"

I've been living here for a while, but I've never seen this happen before.

"Why is there a room here...?"

Stumbling upon the mysterious hidden alcove, initially, I feel some trepidation, but my curiosity quickly wins out, and before I realize it, I'm inside the room.

"This must be..."

The room is full of things that Gramps must have collected in his travels around the world.

Gramps always brought back souvenirs after his trips abroad, but I didn't know where he stored all of it.

That's why finding this hidden room filled with his entire collection is so surprising.

I stare in shock at items clearly hailing from all over the world. Then an odd sensation comes over me.

"Wh-what's going on? Is that...?"

Although I'm confused by the strange feeling, it draws me farther into the room.

As I go deeper, I catch a glimpse of things that Gramps showed me when I was a kid, along with a whole bunch of stuff I've never seen before.

"...Huh? That mask... It's like the face of some demon. Creepy... Hmm? What...sort of doll is that?"

A demonic-looking mask and a mannequin that's bigger than I am.

There's also a red object about the size of a basketball and a weird rock that's hovering and spinning above a stand. How is it doing that?

There's even what looks like an Egyptian pharaoh's sarcophagus.

My gaze wanders across the room as I look around. That's when I

realize something seems to be calling to me.

I venture deeper, guided by that feeling.

...Gramps is the one who collected all this...right?

I remember Gramps used to brag about his adventures, but I was too young to understand at the time. Tears well up in my eyes as I recall those little conversations with him.

Sure, this is his collection, but since I have no idea what any of it is for, it's really just a lot of junk. I wish he was still alive. Gramps could've told me all about them...

"What should I do with this stuff...? Hmm?"

Wanting to avoid touching something carelessly and triggering a weird reaction, I start fretting about what to do with this hoard of stuff, when an object in the back of the room catches my eye.

It's a wooden door that looks like it's missing the wall that should be around it.

There's a carving of a large owl on it, and the frame is decorated with more engravings.

"Did he bring this back with him, too...?"

A whole door?

If he did, where in the world did he get it?

I mean, even if I open it, all I'd see is the wall behind it...right?

But the moment I peer at the door, the strange feeling from earlier grows stronger.

"Wait... Could that be the reason why?"

I've never seen this door before.

But I can't peel my eyes away.

There's no doubt about it: The door is calling to me.

"Is there something more to this door?" I murmur to myself in wonderment as I reach out and turn the knob, pulling it open—

"...Huh?"

On the other side is yet another room I've never seen before.

It looks like the interior of a log cabin, furnished with a large table and a single chair along with a wardrobe. Weapons like axes and swords fill the room as well.

"I— What?"

My brain starts shutting down as I struggle to make sense of these inexplicable sights.

Right then, a half-transparent board appears without warning.

"Whoa!"

It's so sudden that I let out an embarrassing yelp and fall flat on my butt.

However, the half-transparent board follows me down, staying in front of my eyes.

"Wh-what the hell is this...?!"

I start stammering and turn my eyes to the board, which has some writing on it.

“Appraise skill acquired. **Endurance** skill acquired. **Master of the Door** title acquired. **Master of the House** title acquired. **Stranger from a Different World** title acquired. **First-Time Traveler to a Different World** title acquired.”

“Huh?”

It looks like video game text.

A-Appraise? Endurance? And what do you mean a different world...?

I stand up, dust myself off, and return to my own house to gather myself.

“I-it isn’t connected to anything, is it?”

I check the other side of the door, but the only thing there is the wall of my house.

Yet somehow, the door opens up into a room that looks like it’s in some unknown cabin.

“You gotta be kidding me, right?”

What could this door possibly be...?

The moment that thought occurs to me, the translucent panel that had vanished reappears.

Door to a Different World—A door that connects to a different world that appeared on Earth. Why and how it appeared is a mystery even to the gods themselves. It randomly links to another world and, once linked, becomes permanently connected to that world. The Master of the Door may make use of its various features. Impossible to destroy.

Well, now I know.

I mean, I’m glad I learned what it is, but that’s a lot to take in.

At this point, I’m finally calm enough to reach a conclusion.

“Ahhh... Is this the Appraise skill at work?”

But wait a minute... I’m not in the log cabin right now. It’s my house.

...Hold on. Why is the weird half-transparent screen showing up here?

“...I’m not gonna figure out anything by just thinking about it... Oh, I wonder if I can use it to check my skills?”

As I murmur that to myself, the screen reappears, and this time it reads:

Appraise—A skill to appraise various things.

Endurance—Provides resistance to status effects, mind control, and physical pain.

“...There they are.”

That cinches it—the door description came from the Appraise skill.

Man...this got real weird, real fast.

“Does this mean I can also check my titles?”

I’m pretty sure I’ve figured out how this works, and just as expected, the information I requested appears on the board.

Master of the Door—Master of the Door to a Different World. Allows the use of the menu’s functions.

Master of the House—The new master of the house that once belonged to a great sage. Grants ownership of the house.

Stranger from a Different World—A person who hails from a different world. Gains an experience point bonus and different growth progression. Furthermore, provides a bonus to gaining skills. Removes level limits.

First-Time Traveler to a Different World—A person who has traveled to a different world for the first time. Provides a more powerful version of the bonuses provided by the separate skill **Innovator**, which provides a bonus to creating new skills and spells. Directs growth in a useful direction. Furthermore, allows the use of **Item Box**.

“Hmm.”

I don’t exactly get what that all means, but it sure sounds impressive.

Apparently, First-Time Traveler to a Different World is strictly better than the title **Innovator** *and* it lets me use Item Box... Hold up, what’s an Item Box?

Also, I’m not sure what Master of the House refers to. Which house?

While I’m trying to digest all this information, I notice the menu mentioned in the description of Master of the Door.

“Menu functions? What does that actually mean...? Whoa!”

Another new message appears in front of my eyes.

Door to a Different World

Owner: Yuuya Tenjou

Function: <Money Conversion> <Teleportation> <Entry Restrictions>

“Money conversion? I can exchange something for cash? And then

there's teleportation and entry restrictions...?"

As I turn my attention to each item, the message changes to more specific explanations of it.

Money Conversion—Can convert any item into money.

Teleportation—Allows the door to be summoned to the owner's current location.

Entry Restriction—Only those specified by the owner can travel through the door.

"That's a lot more powerful than I expected!"

If I'm reading this right, even if someone else finds this place, they can't use the door.

On top of that, even if someone finds a way to steal this door, it'll come back to me.

"I honestly don't know what I'm supposed to use the money conversion thing for, but it doesn't hurt to have. I guess I can set that aside for now."

If it's this much like a video game, then maybe there's stuff like stats and attributes?

A surge of excitement wells up inside as a new message appears in front of me.

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 1, **Mana:** 1, **Attack:** 1, **Defense:** 1, **Agility:** 1, **Intelligence:** 1, **Luck:** 1, **BP:** 0

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

One look at it immediately sends me into a tailspin of despair.

I never even imagined that all of my attributes would be ones... I've never been *that* bad at anything, not even at school...

Then again, I'd already suspected this much.

Setting that aside for a minute, what's this BP thing?

Hmm, Item Box is also in my skills list...

BP—Acronym for bonus points. 10 are gained with each advance in level and may be distributed to the attribute of your choice. However, those with the title **Stranger from a Different World** receive 20 rather than 10 points. Those with the title **First-Time Traveler to a Different World** receive 100 points.

Item Box—Opens a special spatial dimension where you can store and retrieve items as desired. However, the Item Box may not store living things. No restrictions on storage capacity or item size.

“...Whoa.”

Okay, for now, it's enough to know that I can assign points to my attributes as I see fit, and in my case, I get quite a few more points than normal.

The Item Box also makes sense if I think of it like a game feature.

Now then, I checked out a lot of stuff, but there's one more thing I need to do...

“That room... Yeah, no two ways about it...”

There wasn't anyone home at the time, but now that I think about it, what I did was basically trespassing.

It'd be pretty awful if someone got angry at me over it and decided to attack me.

I also got that weird Master of the House title, but I can't be sure which house it's referring to if I don't check...

Fortunately, I'm the only one who can go through this door, so I'm fine as long as I can escape through it.

“...Time to check it out.”

With that, I decide to go into that room again.

“There's no one here...right...?”

I poke my head cautiously through the door and peer around, but there's no sign of life.

I can feel the floorboards under my feet as I step back inside.

As I enter the room, I spot that wardrobe again. Inside, there's shirts, pants, and some underwear that's clearly meant for someone much thinner.

They feel nice to the touch, so it's a little disappointing they won't fit me.

“Oh, I didn't notice it earlier, but there's a window.”

I approach the window and peer at the world outside. I see a whole slew of trees.

The house I've been living in isn't deep in the rural countryside or anything. It's in a residential part of town, and there's plenty of traffic in my area.

But the only thing I see outside the window is forest, meaning...

“This really is a different world...or at least somewhere else on Earth.”

For a moment, I wonder if it's just a super-realistic picture superimposed over the window, but that doubt vanishes the second I open the door.

Crisp, clean air fills my lungs. This definitely isn't the city. There's no sounds from traffic, construction, or the general buzz of people going about their lives. Everything around me is quiet.

As I close the window and take another look around the room, I notice a piece of paper sitting on the table.

"Wonder what it says."

I pick up the sheet and try to read it, only to find that it's written in strange letters I've never seen before.

"...Can't read it. Is this a language from this world?"

I stare at the paper for a while, despite knowing that there's no way I can decipher it. Then a message suddenly appears in front of me.

"Comprehend Languages skill acquired."

Hold up, that sounds convenient.

I immediately Appraise it...

Comprehend Languages—A skill that allows you to understand every language and read and write in those languages.

That's actually as convenient as it sounds.

If this works on Earth, English and every other foreign language is going to be a piece of cake.

Anyway, I turn my gaze back to the writing now that I can understand it thanks to my new skill.

To summarize, the letter basically says that the owner of this room is nearing the end of their life and has decided to leave behind their worldly possessions.

And since the owner has no family, whoever discovers this house can claim the house for themselves. Evidently, that extends to everything inside as well.

Additionally, since the owner of the house is automatically registered with magic, no one else can enter the house without permission...or so the letter claims.

Ahhh, the Master of the House title probably means that I'm the official owner of this house now.

And based on the description of the title, it seems that a sage used to live here, but that does make me wonder how powerful that person really was?

I'd wager that the ability to prevent anyone besides the owner from entering would be remarkable no matter where you come from, but then again, maybe that's considered normal in this world?

It seems awfully lucky that the door connected to this specific room. Not that I'm not thankful.

"On a separate note, I kinda glossed over it because of all these new developments, but...is magic real in this world?"

Really, this whole situation is so completely beyond my normal frame of reference that even the mention of magic doesn't feel particularly out of place anymore. I'm not exactly awestruck to hear it exists, but the idea of a mysterious, unknown power is undeniably appealing.

I wonder if I can learn how to use it?

"Anyway, it's good to know there's no one here and that no one else can come inside without my permission."

I guess I'm simpleminded like that. Now that I know the house is technically mine, I don't feel any trepidation or fear about being inside it whatsoever.

I figure the next thing to do is confirm what's actually in this house, but...

"These...are all real, aren't they?"

I'm looking at the panoply of weapons arrayed before me.

At random, I pick up a sword that's caught my attention.

"Whoa! Th-this thing's heavy..."

It seems like it'd be obvious, but I'm not particularly strong, so even holding up a sword is a struggle... I should probably do some training. I mean, there was a time when I worked out, but I failed to put on any muscle, so I quickly gave up.

"But man...this is one impressive-looking sword."

It has a glimmering, double-edged blade, almost like someone just finished polishing it. The thing's so clean that I can see my own reflection.

The hilt is almost completely undecorated, but even without knowing anything about swords, there's just something about this one that tells me it's an impressive piece of work.

Out of curiosity, I use my Appraise skill on the blade...

Omnisword—The greatest of all swords. The blade will never dull nor lose its luster, and its edge will always be as sharp as the day it was made. Legend says it can cut through anything, but whether that's true or not depends on its master. Not available for sale. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

"Seriously?!"

Oh crap, this is even more amazing than I thought! And it's already tied to me for some reason! Not for sale? I mean, obviously! Who'd

sell something like this?! It'd almost be sacrilegious!

Who was this sage?!

This sword was just hanging out on a weapon rack like some regular piece of gear!

The kind of person who'd treat an item like this so casually...

I marvel at the remarkable nature of the sage I'll never get a chance to meet, then feel the urge to try out the sword.

"Well, yeah, this is, like, basically every man's dream...right?"

I have no idea who I'm making excuses for, but I desperately try to justify my desires...and do a fairly bad job.

Well, I did want to see what it's like outside, so this is as good a time as any... I hesitantly approach the door and cautiously open it.

"Whoa!"

Turns out the house is situated on a much bigger piece of land than I assumed. What looks like a garden stretches out in front of the house, and there are fields in the distance.

"Is all this considered part of the house?"

If not, then maybe it's a bad idea to be stepping outside at random.

As I wonder about this, a message appears.

"All of the land enclosed within the fences of this property belongs to the Master of the House."

Oh cool, so no one can come into this yard, either! That means I can swing around my sword without worrying! I don't really get how any of this works, but thanks, messenger!

I offer a hearty thank-you to the message for clearing away my concerns and step outside with a boyish spring in my step.

Then I try to swing the heavy sword.

But...

"Gaaaaaah!"

Nope, can't do it.

It's more like the sword is swinging me than the other way around.

Even random swipes are totally beyond me... Yeah, I knew this would happen.

"*Gasp...huff...* Still, that was fun..."

Despite my failure, I still feel an odd sense of fulfillment as I lie down on the ground.

Another message appears.

"Swordsmanship 1 skill acquired."

“Huh?”

Swordsmanship skill?! I was just swinging it around at random!

And what’s this number next to the skill?

As I turn my attention to Swordsmanship 1, a more detailed description appears. Thank goodness for Appraise!

Swordsmanship 1—Skill used for wielding swords. Numbers indicate skill rank, and the maximum rank is 10.

In other words, I’m a total novice when it comes to using a sword.

Honestly, maybe I shouldn’t even call myself a novice...

Still, are skills supposed to be this easy to acquire?

“...Oh, right. The whole Stranger from a Different World bonus.”

It’s probably due to that title.

“Even so, this feels way too quick... Ah, whatever. What about the other weapons?”

With my curiosity piqued, I return the sword to the rack and pick up another weapon, taking it with me to the yard.

Appraise reveals that all these weapons are just as ridiculous as the sword. The highlights include:

Absolute Spear—The ultimate spear, more powerful than even the Divine Spear. Said to be able to pierce anything depending on the contractor. Will never break. Will always hit its target when thrown and will automatically return to the wielder’s hand. Not for sale. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

Deathscythe—A scythe that can kill even the god of death. Said to be able to cut apart anything its pledged wielder wants to destroy. Any wounds inflicted by this scythe, no matter how small, are fatal. Not for sale. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

Infinite Gauntlet—A gauntlet that not only increases the power of the wearer’s fists, but also provides unbreakable protection. One blow becomes infinite blows. Not for sale. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

Void Bow—The ultimate bow that has no shape or form and creates infinite arrows. Its arrows can penetrate the very world itself and will always hit whatever the pledged wielder intends to hit. Not for sale. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

It just goes on and on...

There are quite a few items in total, but I eventually get through trying all of them.

My conclusion?

They're all ridiculous.

I still have no idea why these things are just lying around in this house or who the sage was. Maybe the worst thing is that I'm somehow now the pledged wielder of all of them.

And my current stats are:

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 1, **Mana:** 1, **Attack:** 1, **Defense:** 1, **Agility:** 1, **Intelligence:** 1, **Luck:** 1, **BP:** 0

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, Swordsmanship: 1, Spear: 1, Scythe: 1, Brawling: 1, Archery: 1, Whip: 1, Ax: 1, Machete: 1, Staff: 1, Club: 1...etc.

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

Honestly, I don't even know where to start.

This just happened after I finished playing with all of the weapons.

I couldn't help but just stare at my stats, slack-jawed.

"Prerequisites met. All combat skills have been combined into skill **True Art of War 1**. True Art of War: 1 skill acquired."

What the heck is that?!

I immediately Appraise it...

True Art of War—A realm only reached by those who have learned the use of all weapons and martial arts. Grants the ability to use any and all weapons and martial arts.

That doesn't sound right!

It's impossible! I mean, think about it! Who would see my performance and call that being in control?!

Still, regardless of how I feel about the matter, my stats are updated, and that sprawl of weapon skills has completely vanished, replaced by a single entry for True Art of War.

...Did the sage also have this ridiculous ability? ...The odds seem good, yeah.

Despite not knowing what I'm doing, I've acquired an insanely broken skill.

After my little experiment, I figure I should clean up the weapons that

are scattered around the yard. Then I suddenly remember that I have the Item Box skill and decide to give it a try.

Except I don't technically know how to use it. On a hunch, I try silently calling upon the Item Box in my head. In response, a black void appears in front of me.

I jerk backward in surprise and fall down, but I quickly figure out that I can make it appear and vanish at will. As a test, I try tossing a pen I'd brought from my house into the inky blackness.

Then I dismiss the portal and resummon it. When I gingerly reach into the portal, the image of a ballpoint pen appears in my head.

After quickly grasping how it works, I move quickly, picking up and tossing the weapons scattered around the yard into the Item Box.

Of course, I've already checked to make sure I can store and retrieve the items at will. I admit I'm a little surprised I can retrieve them on Earth, too.

By the time I'm finished with everything, I feel drained, and there's a faint but distinct wobble in my step. I return through the strange door back to Gramps's secret room.

This isn't...a dream, right?

I stare into the distance, deep in thought—but then my stomach rumbles.

I check the clock and realize it's already lunchtime.

That reminds me... Time seems to pass at around the same speed on the other side of the door. I mean, I'm glad that's the case.

I go and open the fridge in my house to grab something to eat, but it's empty.

"Oh, whoops... Right, I kept putting off a run for groceries..."

If I don't eat anything, I'll pass out from hunger before long, so I grab my wallet and reluctantly head to the nearby convenience store to grab a bite to eat.

Even though it's still early spring, my body begins to sweat the moment I'm exposed to the midday sun.

Yep... This is what sucks about being terribly overweight...

I'm already winded by the time I reach the convenience store, and there, I run into a situation I would have preferred to have avoided.

"C'mon now, you can spare a little time to grab some coffee with us."

"For the last time, I'm not interested! Now please let me go home!"

"Don't be like that."

Some guys in flashy outfits are harassing a girl about my age.

There's a fair amount of foot traffic at this convenience store, but we're in the middle of a residential neighborhood. I can't believe they'd come here of all places and then just start pestering passersby.

The girl clearly doesn't want to go with them, and she's actively

trying to get away from them, only for them to give chase.

When I take a look around, I notice there's other people nearby, but all of them are pretending they don't see what's happening.

A moment later, one of the men finally makes a move, grabbing the girl's arm.

"C'mon, let's get outta here."

"Relax, we won't hurt you."

"No! Let me go!"

"U-um!"

"...Huh?"

The men all turn to glare at me.

They're intimidating, and I can already tell they're looking down on me.

...Honestly, this is scary as all hell, and I would've just ignored them if it was an option.

But if Gramps were here, he would have immediately leaped into action.

Gramps was the sort who would go out of his way to help anyone in trouble.

Even though most people treated him like a hypocrite or a madman, I loved Gramps because he always upheld his principles.

Which is why I act before I really have a chance to think about it.

"The hell do you want, fatty? You got something to say to us? Huh?"

"Eep! N-no...uh... Well...she really doesn't seem to want to go with you..."

"Say what?"

Apparently, my words rub them the wrong way, and the men let go of the girl, quickly surrounding me instead.

"Who do you think you are? Some knight in shining armor?"

"No, that's not..."

"Shut up!"

"Gah!"

One of the men hits me in the face without a moment's hesitation.

I roll on the ground in pain, prompting the men to close in and start kicking me.

"Don't tell us what to do, you damned pig!"

"You're creepy, fatso!"

"Eat shit and die!"

My face, my chest, my stomach.

Each time a sharp kick lands on my body, the pain sends my consciousness reeling.



Suddenly, the beating stops.

“Shit, the cops are here!”

“Wha—?! Oh hell!”

“Somebody’s snitching! Let’s get out of here!”

Evidently, the police have shown up, sending the men scattering.

My whole body aches, but it’s not unbearable. Doesn’t look like I have any broken bones, either.

...Kind of sad that this is how my Endurance comes in handy.

Wait. Something’s wrong.

I’m pretty sure any one of those kicks was strong enough to knock me out. Everything definitely hurts a lot, but I’m still conscious.

...Could this really be thanks to a skill?

I suppose I should have realized it when the Appraise skill worked at home, but it seems all my skills really do work on Earth. As I’m pondering this, the girl who had been accosted runs over to me and helps me up.

“Are you all right?! Let me go call an ambulance...”

“I-I’m fine... R-really, I don’t need to go to the hospital...”

“A-are you sure...?”

“Yes... I’m fine...”

This girl is genuinely worried about someone as ugly as me. I feel my heart skip a beat as I force myself to stand up despite the pain.

“Ow...”

“Please lean on my shoulder...”

“N-no, it’s fine... I’m all right...”

“B-but...”

“I’m all good... I’m sorry you had to deal with that... Please be careful from now on as well.”

Although by all appearances, this girl is worried about me, I take a step back from her as I get up.

She’s just been harassed by a bunch of men. I’m sure she’s not comfortable dealing with another man just now. At least, that’s the logic I’m following when I purposefully distance myself.

Then again, I suppose if she doesn’t consider me human, much less a man, then maybe it doesn’t really matter.

I go through various self-deprecating rationalizations in my head when the police run over.

There are three officers in total, two women and a man. Hopefully this girl feels more at ease now.

“We’re responding to a call...”

“Oh yes. Some men wouldn’t leave me alone, and when they started getting more aggressive, he stepped in to help me! And then...”

The girl explains the situation, and because I appear to be the only victim here, it seems this’ll just be treated as a minor incident and

nothing more... Though that's a teeny bit weird considering how I ended up.

Once the police finish interviewing the girl, they decide to escort her home.

They then turn to me.

"We'll accompany you home as well. Which way do you live?"

"U-uh, I'm fine... I came here to buy some things, so..."

"I see... Then be careful on your way home."

As the police begin to set off with the girl, she stops, turns to me, and bows.

"Thank you so much for saving me!"

"Wha—? Oh, no, please don't worry about it... I mean, I ultimately didn't do much."

"That's not true! I was so relieved when you helped me! I'm really grateful! I'll make sure to return the favor somehow."

"P-please don't worry about it... A-anyway, um, take care..."

In general, I don't speak to other people a lot, and I choke on my words as I try to wrap up this conversation and turn around to leave.

...I couldn't bring myself to look her in the face.

Can you blame me? I basically never talk to women of my own accord, and even when they initiate conversation, it's almost always to launch a barrage of one-sided insults.

Because of those incidents, I have virtually no experience interacting with women.

Still, that girl was worried about me, even if it might have been for show.

She seems like a good person... I hope she'll be all right.

As I mull over the incident and think about the girl, I decide to venture a little farther to the supermarket to do a little shopping before returning to the convenience store on the way home.

Having finished lunch and cleaning the house, I once again make my way to the strange door.

After stepping into the cabin, I walk out and look around the yard.

"It really is massive... I still can't believe this is all mine..."

I don't just mean the yard and the house. The fact that this is a different world is a beautiful mystery.

Quite the mystery. The Appraise skill says not even the gods know the reason why the door connects this world with Earth. Oh, hold on. That straight up says there are gods! Huh! So supernatural beings are real here!

I let my thoughts wander as I take in my surroundings—until I'm suddenly seized by a feeling of dread.

My entire body tenses. Breathing suddenly becomes difficult, and I

instinctively want to suck in air.

Sweat streams out of every pore of my body as I try to figure out why I'm reacting this way. My eyes dart back and forth in a panic.

Then I spot the source of my dread standing at the entrance separating the garden from the outside world.

"Gasp... Wheeze...!"

"..."

It stands over two meters tall with black-red skin the color of dried blood.

The creature sports thick arms, practically the same width as my own bloated body.

It has the face of an oni straight out of Japanese mythology, with two sharp fangs jutting out from its lower jaw.

Projecting the aura of an overwhelmingly powerful hunter, it is entirely focused on me.

As its hungry gaze burrows into me, I quiver even as I use what little composure I have remaining to activate my Appraise skill.

Bloody Ogre

Level: 300, **Mana:** 100, **Attack:** 5000, **Defense:** 5000, **Agility:** 1000, **Intelligence:** 500, **Luck:** 100

The hell?!

What's up with those ridiculous stats?! All of mine are at 1!

Even dreaming about taking on a level-300 opponent when you're level 1 is beyond stupid!

And the name Bloody Ogre... I can't help but remember now of all times that Araki, my tormentor, belongs to a group called the Red Ogres, and I sink even further into despair.

I freak out even harder as the difference in stats sinks in. That's when the Bloody Ogre lets out a roar.

"Graaaaaaaaaaargh!"

"Aaah!"

The sheer volume makes my knees give out.

I come dangerously close to wetting my pants, but my badly depleted pride helps me hold on to a shred of dignity.

With my knees still like jelly, I'm helpless as the Bloody Ogre charges me.

The moment I see it move, I figure I'm done for.

However—

"Grah?!"

The Bloody Ogre stops in mid-stride as an invisible wall keeps it from going any farther.

“Oh...”

That's right... I'm the only one who can enter this property!

I finally remember that fact. That said, it's not like I can do anything just because I realize this.

The Bloody Ogre's still trying to get into the yard, slamming its fists against the invisible barrier with terrifying speed.

“Graaaaaaaaaaargh!”

But just like how I'm unable to do anything, the Bloody Ogre can't do anything to the house and simply continues its pointless attacks. I don't know how else to put it. Apparently, I can just leave the monster alone.

The moment I catch my breath and feel a little relief, the Bloody Ogre stops its assault and reaches for a nearby tree.

It easily yanks the tree out of the ground and hurls the whole thing at the house.

“Wait! What?! Aaaaaaaah!”

Can an inanimate object pass through the barrier even if it stops living creatures? A new wave of terror grips me, but the house's defenses turn out to be much more powerful than I first assumed, easily deflecting the tree.

...It seriously can't do anything to this house.

After all, the defense system completely neutralized its direct and indirect attacks.

I finally understand that the Bloody Ogre can't lay a finger on me, but even then, it shows no sign of giving up and renews its attacks.

Even if I know it can't hurt me, this isn't good for my heart.

Is there anything I can do...?

The moment I start thinking about my next step, a natural question slips out.

“...Will *my* attacks go through the barrier?”

Yes, it seems like the defense system stops any attacks coming from the outside world, but what'll happen when I try attacking from the inside?

To find out, I draw the Absolute Spear from my Item Box.

Why the Absolute Spear and not the Void Bow? Well, embarrassingly enough, I'm not strong enough to draw back the string on it. Simply making an attempt gave me the Archery skill for some strange reason, though.

On the other hand, while the Absolute Spear is incredibly heavy, and there's no way I could actually reach the Bloody Ogre by throwing it normally, once I decide on a target, this spear will fly toward it even if I only throw it forward a few millimeters. Even better, it'll return to my hand afterward.

I already confirmed all of those details while messing around with

all the weapons after my first go with the Omnisword.

So...

“...Guess I’ll try throwing it.”

I decide, as a bit of an experiment, to hurl the Absolute Spear at the Bloody Ogre as it continues testing the house’s defenses.

Throwing a weapon at a living creature is definitely something I wouldn’t ordinarily do, but the fear from the Bloody Ogre has completely numbed me to the implications.

“...All right.”

Having made my decision, I get a firm grip on the Absolute Spear.

The Absolute Spear has nothing in the way of decorations. It’s a simple weapon that looks like it was made with nothing in mind besides piercing whatever happens to be in its way.

That’s actually what makes it easy to use, and even a complete beginner like me feels totally comfortable with it resting in my hand.

That doesn’t change the fact that it’s heavy, and my body wobbles as I somehow manage to throw it.

“Th-there!”

“Grah?!”

The Bloody Ogre senses the threat approaching and puts up its guard.

Even though I use all the strength I can muster, the Absolute Spear is so heavy that my throw is all-in-all pathetic, more a clumsy lob that covers no more than a few centimeters rather than a proper throw.

The Bloody Ogre immediately registers how weak my throw is and lets down its guard, but...

“Grargh!”

The Absolute Spear flies out of my hand, paying absolutely no heed to my meager strength, and reaches the Bloody Ogre in the blink of an eye before easily piercing its body.

“Guh...gragh...”

The Bloody Ogre stares in disbelief, completely baffled by what’s happened. Its eyes open wide in shock as it collapses, a huge hole gaping in its chest.

“I—I got it...!”

Ordinarily, those words would trigger something, but there’s nothing for me to worry about, as the Bloody Ogre begins to turn into motes of light, vanishing from the spot.

I slump down to the ground.

“Heh. Heh-heh-heh...”

I bask in the relief that I’m still alive and reel from the fact that I just killed a living creature.

My only reaction is a weak, stunned laugh.

But I don’t feel as guilty as I thought I would. I’m fortunate that I

didn't actually have to experience the sensation of a spear sinking into flesh.

For a little while longer, I continue staring into the distance. Then I notice that there's a bunch of objects lying on the ground where the Bloody Ogre collapsed.

...I want to move, but my legs won't listen to me.

It's embarrassing, but my hips have given out from under me, and with my knees like jelly, it doesn't look like I'm going anywhere anytime soon.

As I sit there, a message appears in front of my eyes.

“You have gained a level.”

“Huh?”

I once again find myself staring in shock.

G-gained a level...?

I stare blankly at the message that's appeared in front of me.

...On second thought, that makes a sort of sense.

A level-1 person just killed a level-300 creature.

Which reminds me—my attack stat is a measly 1, meaning the only reason I was able to kill an opponent despite the overwhelming level gap has to be due to the Absolute Spear's attack ability.

“...Wow, this spear's one hundred percent OP.”

Aaand I have a pile of other weapons that are just as broken. Mastering all of them would be ridiculous...

But anyway, what does leveling up mean, exactly?

I bring up my stats and check to see what's changed.

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 100, **Mana:** 1000, **Attack:** 1000, **Defense:** 1000, **Agility:** 1000, **Intelligence:** 1000, **Luck:** 1000, **BP:** 10000

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, True Art of War: 1

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

“Whoa, whoa, whoa.”

This is unbelievable.

...Then again, I did just kill a level-300 opponent, so maybe this is about right...?

Huh... Looks like my stats go up by 10 each time I gain a level. Of

course, I don't know if that's high or if everyone is like that.

Even setting everything else aside, I can tell at a glance that my BP count is way higher than normal. I know that's the effect of First-Time Traveler to a Different World, but still.

"I can spend the BP on whatever I want, right...?"

I suppose I could spend it right now, but I think I'd rather see what's lying around over where the Bloody Ogre fell. Let's check that first.

I feel my legs still trembling as I get up and walk with a wobbly gait.

"...What's this?"

The first things I find are a strangely colored gemstone about the size of my palm and a giant fang matching the Bloody Ogre's. There's also some black-red armor that's giving off a faintly ominous aura, but I have to admit it also looks pretty cool.

"...Guess I should pick up everything for now."

Fortunately, since I killed the Bloody Ogre near the entrance, it doesn't take long to collect it all.

There's only a few items, but they all have this weird...presence? Aura? Whatever it is, even I can tell at a glance that they're all powerful.

Then again, just staring at them won't tell me anything concrete, so I activate Appraise... I'm starting to get into the habit of just activating it whenever I see something new.

Great Fang of the Bloodstained Ogre—Fang of a Bloody Ogre. The fang is as impressive as it looks and, when combined with the Bloody Ogre's impressive jaw strength, can pierce the skin of anything the ogre considers prey. An artisan can use this as material to create tough, sharp weapons.

Magic Stone: B—Rank B. A special ore that can be obtained when killing monsters with mana. Quality is denoted by the following ranks in ascending order: F, E, D, C, B, A, S . The higher the rank, the greater the value.

Breastplate of the Bloodstained Ogre—Bloody Ogre item drop. Made of the tough hide and muscle fibers of the Bloody Ogre. Immense strength is required to even damage this breastplate. Provides an attack bonus to its wearer.

Gauntlets of the Bloodstained Ogre—Bloody Ogre item drop. Made of the tough hide and muscle fibers of the Bloody Ogre. Immense strength is required to even damage these gauntlets. Provides an attack bonus to its wearer.

Faulds of the Bloodstained Ogre—Bloody Ogre item drop. Made of the tough hide and muscle fibers of the Bloody Ogre. Immense strength is required to even damage these faulds. Provides an agility

bonus to its wearer.

Greaves of the Bloodstained Ogre—Bloody Ogre item drop. Made of the tough hide and muscle fibers of the Bloody Ogre. Immense strength is required to even damage these greaves. Provides an agility bonus to its wearer.

This is gear straight out of some fantasy game.

A magic rock, a fang... When is a regular dude like me going to use this? It's not like I'm in dire need of armor on Earth.

Besides, I don't have any idea how practical this stuff might be. I already have plenty of weapons, and as for the Magic Stone, it's got an alphabetic ranking of some sort, but that's all I know about it even after using Appraise.

On top of that, the armor isn't sized correctly for my bloated body, and there's no way I can wear it. Exactly what am I supposed to do with it?

All that being said, the breastplate resembles the Bloody Ogre's muscular torso, while the gauntlets have a sharp, menacing look to them. The faulds follow a similar design, and there's also a red cloak, while the greaves basically seem like the gauntlets adapted to work as greaves. All in all, the armor looks insanely cool.

"It's nice to have, but I don't exactly have a use for these..."

Maybe it wasn't so important that I had to postpone thinking about my BPs.

Might as well spend them now.

"Hmm... Seeing as how I can't use magic, I might as well focus on increasing my attack strength."

I'm the aggressive type of player, preferring to put most of my stats into offensive abilities. Or at least I would be if I could afford the luxury of video games, but still!

At any rate, upping my mana would be a waste since I can't use magic, but given that I'm bullied all the time, maybe I should increase my defense?

"...Then there's this luck stat..."

Ordinarily, unlike something like physical strength, luck doesn't change no matter how much effort you put into it. But here, it went up just like all my other stats when I leveled up.

In that sense, it might be a good idea to spend my points on luck.

"...Man, I'm starting to enjoy this."

I've never had the opportunity to enjoy any games or diversions before, so this situation's almost like a form of entertainment for me. Sure, there's a bunch of scary things involved, like getting stared down by an angry ogre, but there's an undeniable appeal to it all.

Anyway, I gained levels, and my various stats reportedly went up,

but I don't feel any different, so I may as well spend my points like I'm playing a game.

Having made the decision to treat it all rather casually, I begin spending my BP as I see fit.

Here's the results...

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 100, **Mana:** 1500, **Attack:** 3000, **Defense:** 3000, **Agility:** 3000, **Intelligence:** 1500, **Luck:** 4000, **BP:** 0

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, True Art of War: 1

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

Looks pretty good, right?

I didn't spend much on mana, since I can't use magic. As for intelligence, well, it'd be great if it would improve my ability to study and learn things, but I also considered the fact that it might just be a stat that only makes my magic spells stronger or something like that, so I didn't put all that many points into it.

Instead, I spent points equally on attack, defense, and agility.

After that, I poured the remaining points into luck, since I can't do anything to improve that stat otherwise.

I'm all done, but...

"...Nothing's happening."

Seems like the display really is just a sort of game system, and there won't be any real physical changes to my body.

"Well, whatever... Way too much happened today. I need some rest. Time to go home..."

I guess technically I'm already inside my house...

While making clever comments to myself, I head back to the Door to a Different World with my slightly improved body.

A message suddenly pops up in front of me.

"You have several items you can convert into money. Convert the following items into money: Great Fang of the Bloodstained Ogre, Magic Stone: B, Breastplate of the Bloodstained Ogre, Gauntlets of the Bloodstained Ogre, Fauld of the Bloodstained Ogre, Greaves of the Bloodstained Ogre?"

"Huh?"

C-convert into money?

I can't figure out what it means for a second, until I remember that one of the special features that I gained from becoming Master of the Door included converting things into money.

"Money conversion... I wonder how it works?"

I know nothing about the process, but it's true that I don't have good use for these items.

Still, I might try on the armor, gauntlets, and greaves at some point, so I remove them from the list and convert the rest.

Then...

"Items converted into money. Great Fang of the Bloodstained Ogre—500,000 yen. Magic Stone: B—1,000,000 yen."

"Excuse me?" I yelp in surprise.

As though to press home the point, bundles of paper fall out of thin air.

"....."

I literally don't understand what's happening.

Taking a closer look, I realize the bundles are all 10,000-yen notes.

Slack-jawed, I pick up the bundles and count out 1.5 million yen's worth of bills, just like the message said.

I use every method I can think of to check if they're counterfeit, but so far as I can tell, they're real.

Almost out of reflex, I use Appraise to confirm.

1,500,000 Yen—Money converted from items from a different world. Legal tender. 10,000-yen bills with legitimate serial numbers added by adjusting information in Earth's economy to avoid complications.

I find myself even more confused.

Wait, what does "adjusting information" mean?! I get that they're real, but come on!

I don't know how much I can trust the contents of the Appraise messages, but if it's right, then that means I just got my hands on 1.5 million yen.

Maybe I'm just inclined to believe it in my euphoria, but the messages seem trustworthy.

Besides, if the door is something that even the gods don't understand, then altering information on Earth or whatever seems totally plausible. Not that I can even begin to grasp what that means in practice.

Still...

“Whoa... So this really is more than a million yen... What should I do with this...?”

I mean, given that I’m struggling just to get by, this is a huge windfall.

Sure, some might say that this isn’t morally acceptable or that I should think more clearly about the consequences, but it’s not like I’m a particularly virtuous or smart person.

If there’s profit to be had in front of me, of course I’m going to jump on it.

Which is why...

“...I’m keeping it.”

Of course, I can’t exactly deposit all this at the bank, so I toss it into the Item Box along with the set of armor. I’ll just use it a little bit at a time.

I make the decision after recovering from the giant shock that waited right at the threshold and wobble through the door back to Earth.

CHAPTER 2

The Benefits of Leveling Up

Later that night, I'm so exhausted that I immediately fall asleep, but I wake up bothered by an unfamiliar feeling.

"...Mm? What's...?"

My entire body is hot, like I'm running a fever.

As I cock my head in confusion after sensing there's something wrong with my body, I suddenly feel a huge jolt of pain.

"Guh?! Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

I let out a scream at the sheer intensity of the agony.

Strange noises are coming from all over my body, like my entire skeleton, musculature, and nerves are being reconstituted... No, it's more than that. It feels like my body is being rewritten at a genetic level.

I can't really claim to be explaining this in a coherent manner, but that's what my gut says is happening.

"Urrrgh, gah, aaaagh..."

The changes eventually reach my mouth and throat, robbing me of the ability to speak.

"Ah—"

Unable to endure it any longer, I pass out.

"Mm...mrmph?"

It's the dawn of a new day.

When I wake up, there's no trace of the pain that racked my body the night before. If anything, my body feels extremely light.

"What in the world happened last night...?"

I tilt my head quizzically, still having absolutely no idea what caused the intense pain. Feeling hungry, I get up to make some breakfast.

"...Huh?"

The moment I get out of bed, the pants and underwear I'm wearing

slip off.

I glance down and find a well-defined six pack of abs and the sight of an unfamiliar member. I-it's huge...

I reach down to touch the abs, and I can feel that I'm touching my own stomach, so it's definitely my body.

...

"Whaaaaaaaaaat?!"

What the hell is going on?! Is this really all me?!

I repeatedly touch my stomach in surprise, but there's no room for doubt anymore. As for the rest... When I gingerly examine my face, all the zits and other blemishes are gone, and I notice there's a full head of hair up there.

It's just one astonishing discovery after another as I find more parts of me changed. I only stop when my stomach growls loudly. Whatever's happening, I still need to eat, so I decide to go and make some breakfast for the time being.

As I make my way to the kitchen, I realize my line of sight is higher than normal, and I almost freeze in confusion. Eventually, I manage to reach the kitchen and start cooking.

Even after I finish making breakfast, the shock of my transformation refuses to go away. I can barely taste anything I've made.

After I finish eating, I take a moment to reflect and ponder my body's changes.

...It's gotta be the fact that I leveled up yesterday...

Having regained a semblance of calm, I immediately home in on the most likely explanation. At the very least, nothing else comes to mind.

My best guess for why nothing happened until I went to sleep is because it works similar to growth spurts, maybe? Still, this is way too much of a dramatic change.

"I wish I had a mirror..."

Some half-hearted digging around ensues, but I know I broke the only mirror in the house in a fit of rage yesterday.

Still, it's not a huge problem if I can't check my new appearance. I mean, I was dead ugly to begin with, so I can't imagine it's gotten any worse. And there isn't much I can do about it either way.

Right now, I'm facing a more pressing issue.

Specifically...

"I've got nothing to wear..."

That's right. None of my clothes fit me now.

Sure, I can wear some things like shirts even if they're too loose, but you can't say the same about pants or underwear.

They're way too big for me, and no matter what I try, they slide right off.

I don't own any belts since I've never needed one before, meaning

there's no way for me to hold my pants up. Well, I guess if there's no other choice, I can always resort to some string or rope...

Either way, this is no joke. It's a really, really big problem.

At this rate, I won't be able to go buy new clothes or go grocery shopping.

Oh man, I just realized I can't even wear my school uniform.

My school is a bit unusual. The uniforms for the high school students are the same as the middle schoolers, and the only difference is the color of the name tags we're given each year. In other words, even if I wanted to wear my middle school uniform, it's still nowhere near the right size.

"What am I supposed to do...?"

As I dwell on my problem, I suddenly remember something.

"Oh, wait a minute. The closet in that house had some clothes in it, I think..."

In the other world, there were some clothes and underwear that were cut too slim for my old figure.

"Might as well try those on..."

Not like I have a lot of other options right now. I immediately go through the door, enter my other house, and begin exploring the closet.

Good, my memory is right. There's a few sets of clothes and underwear.

These almost look like white button-ups and black slacks. Simple enough, and they can pass for normal clothes back on Earth.

"Phew... I can wear these...right?"

I don't see any real reason to do so, but I use my Appraise skill on them.

Shirt of Royal Silk—A shirt made of Royal Silk. It has an extremely delicate texture and is the most refined and elegant of all silk fabrics. The shirt automatically resizes itself to fit the physique of the wearer. It regulates the wearer's body temperature for optimal comfort. Will not become dirty or blemished and is imbued with a self-repair enchantment. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

Pants of Royal Silk—Pants made of Royal Silk. It has an extremely delicate texture and is the most refined and elegant of all silk fabrics. The pants automatically resize themselves to fit the physique of the wearer. They regulate the wearer's body temperature for optimal comfort. Will not become dirty or blemished and are imbued with a self-repair enchantment. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

"Seriously?"

What's with these stats?! It's way beyond anything normal clothes should have.

Moreover, even though I was quite rotund when I first found them, I could've worn them without any trouble.

Then there's the fact that no matter how hot or how cold it gets outside, these clothes should keep me at a comfortable temperature. I really don't get how this stuff works.

It even casually claims it can't get dirty at all... This is a feature that homemakers all over the world would clap their hands in glee over.

The description aside, these white shirts and black pants really do feel like they project a peculiar elegance and class. At least, that's the vague impression I get. Not like I have much of an eye for these things.

Hold on, what's this whole thing about a contractor for even basic clothes? Is it just standard in this world? That can't be it, right? At least, that's what I'm going to tell myself until proven otherwise.

Also, if the clothes have these stats, then what about the underwear? With that thought in mind, I Appraise the underwear, but turns out it's just unbelievably comfortable. No additional special properties of any kind.

That said, even this description includes the bit about the contractor.

Oh, by the way, the underwear consists of a black undershirt and similarly black boxers.

"Man, this is amazing..."

I'm sure the sage didn't expect all this stuff to be used this way, but it's been incredibly helpful.

I dig around in the closet a bit more and find a pair of shoes and some socks.

The socks are insanely comfy, but their only notable characteristic is that they'll never get stuffy, and I'm the contractor. Other than that, they're just really cool looking, black with a little bit of gold trim.

Now, the shoes? The shoes are another thing entirely.

Leather Shoes of the Dragon God—A pair of leather shoes crafted from the hide of the greatest of dragons, the Dragon God. Nullifies the adverse effects of all terrains. The wearer will not tire or develop any blisters no matter how far they walk or run. Automatically resizes to fit the wearer. Will not become dirty. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

We've finally reached the point where a piece of a literal god is one of the materials used.

What the actual crap?! What should I do with this? It even says I'm

the owner, like that makes any sense. I mean, sure, I'm grateful, but come on.

Nothing I do on a daily basis warrants shoes like these. They're way beyond the realm of ordinary footwear.

But again, like everything else, these shoes are super cool looking. Black leather with a faint blue tinge. Of course I want to wear them.

And yeah, my feet have changed size, so I need a new pair regardless.

At any rate, now that I have some proper clothes and shoes, I can finally go outside.

"That reminds me, I wonder what's growing in the garden."

Having acquired clothing, my curiosity is piqued again, and I decide to give the other house another look. And before anyone judges me, just know that I've already finished the homework assignments for spring break.

I also just lucked into the equivalent of several years' worth of pay from my part-time jobs.

Seeing as how I have some free time, it'd be a shame not to take advantage of it. Besides, I'm sure I'll be busy as ever once spring break ends.

With that in mind, I step outside and check the plots in the garden.

"Ohhh, there's some weird herbs and...vegetables, I assume?"

There's a whole array of plants growing, from grasses that almost look like common weeds to things that resemble tomatoes and daikon radishes.

Since the grassy stuff is growing in neat little rows, I'm sure it's not random weeds.

"Hmm? Ah, I assume that's what you use to water them."

Right next to the garden plot is a silver watering can.

When I pick it up, I notice there's already water inside.

"...Don't tell me. I'll bet money this is some special watering can."

I can't help but use my Appraise skill...

Bottomless Watering Can—A watering can that pours out infinite amounts of water. The water inside is called Holy Cleansing Water and will revive even the most withered plants. The water is always pure and potable. Anyone who drinks the water will have all of their fatigue dispelled and their mana increased. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

"I figured as much."

Yeeep.

This is starting to become routine.

I've come around to the fact that the sage, the original owner of this house, was someone beyond my wildest imaginings.

It feels a bit odd to think someone like that died.

"Hrm. What about these plants?"

I Appraise the grass first.

Which comes up as...

Herb of Complete Healing—Consuming this will cure any wounds or diseases, including lost limbs or lost eyesight. Also replenishes mana. When harvested, they automatically drop seeds, making them extremely easy to cultivate. However, the herbs are so hard to find, they are nearly mythical in rarity.

"Never mind what I said about routine."

How could I not be surprised by something this ridiculous?!

This is the sort of thing that would make every doctor in the world cry tears of joy.

Well, at least I know it's easy to grow.

"And the rest?"

I'm a bit nervous as I shift my attention to the other crops in the plot.

Tomato of Super Strength—A tomato that increases your attack when consumed. Also increases physical strength and stamina, making your body more resistant to fatigue. When harvested, they automatically drop seeds, making them extremely easy to cultivate.

Pumpkin of Invincibility—A pumpkin that increases your defense when consumed. Also provides mental clarity, making you more resistant to mental attacks and status effects. When harvested, they automatically drop seeds, making them extremely easy to cultivate.

Daikon of Great Wisdom—A radish that increases your intelligence when consumed. Also enables you to use your brain in special ways such as running parallel thought processes and accelerated thought processes. When harvested, they automatically drop seeds, making them extremely easy to cultivate.

Potato of God Speed—A potato that increases your agility when consumed. Also improves your hand-eye coordination and reflexes. When harvested, they automatically drop seeds, making them extremely easy to cultivate.

There's so much I want to comment on.

Everything raises stats! Just what was the sage trying to

accomplish?!

And all of them leave seeds? That makes no sense! I mean, do potatoes even have seeds? Normally no, right?

These vegetables are all fantasy goods. Sure, they look normal, but that's where the similarities end.

"...Well, looks like I can eat them, and if they increase my stats...I can't think of a reason not to."

I mean, if I can eat these, then I can save on my food expenses, so that's a nice little bonus. So long as they don't have any weird side effects like some medicine or anything.

"Honestly, this is a bit exhausting to take in all at once."

It's not even noon, and I could already use a break. Who could blame me?

Just as I'm thinking that, I detect a menacing presence nearby. It's the same feeling I got yesterday when the Bloody Ogre showed up.

I immediately turn my gaze in the direction it's coming from, and I see a pitch-black slime-like object sitting there.

"...The heck is that?"

I reflexively use Appraise.

Hell Slime

Level: 200, **Mana:** 5000, **Attack:** 1000, **Defense:** 5000, **Agility:** 100, **Intelligence:** 100, **Luck:** 100

"You gotta be kidding me..."

First a Bloody Ogre and now a Hell Slime...?

There's no way this forest is meant for noobs. Not that I think the sage would've lived in a place meant for beginners.

Still, even though the slime's mana and defense are equal to yesterday's Bloody Ogre, I find that I'm strangely calm.

True, it is a bit intimidating, but I don't feel the sheer terror that came over me yesterday.

It's not that I'm not afraid—I'm just not as afraid as I was before.

My higher level and the fact that the Hell Slime is a lower level than the Bloody Ogre aren't the reasons why.

More like my psyche itself is different.

...It's a little disturbing to be able to recognize and observe that firsthand, but it's good that I'm able to maintain my composure through everything.

As I calmly watch the Hell Slime, it starts slamming into the barrier, trying to get into the garden, like the Bloody Ogre that came before it.

"Yeesh, this world's creatures are really scary..."

Seriously, it's way too ruthless. The first thing they do when they

see humans is attack.

...Or is it that Earth's way more peaceful than average?

"Whatever. Anyway, I don't really want to leave the grounds, but I do want to check out the surrounding area. That means I can't really avoid fighting, right...?"

As I think that, I retrieve the Absolute Spear from the Item Box.

"Huh. I can hold it properly..."

The Absolute Spear rests comfortably in one hand now. I guess that's supposed to be considered normal, but to me, it's a remarkable accomplishment.

Caught off guard by the fact that I can lift the spear with just one hand, I can't contain the urge to swing it around for a bit.

Though the spear's momentum is still jerking me around a little, I'm actually able to handle it fairly well.

"Whoa, the effects of leveling up are insane. This makes all my weight training seem silly..."

I get the sense that the main issue now stems from the fact that I don't know how to wield a spear, so what would happen if I looked up how to use a spear in a book or something?

It probably won't be easy, but I can already swing the spear without too much trouble, and more than anything, I think most dudes would find something attractive about becoming proficient with a weapon... I do want to get stronger, even if it's a little bit at a time.

"But for that to happen, I have to do something about that thing first."

I take a firm grip on the spear and prepare to throw it in a way that would've been impossible for me yesterday.

With no trace of hesitation in my movements, I wind up and then effortlessly launch the spear with one hand.

"No way!"

The spear flies off at a much higher velocity than I expected... No, it's even faster than that, and by the time I look over, there's a yawning hole in the Hell Slime's body.

Seems like I'm a lot stronger than I realize. The spear shoots forward with such force that I can't follow it with my eyes.

As I stare in shock, the spear returns to my hand.



The Hell Slime trembles a bit before disappearing in a shower of glowing shards like when I killed the Bloody Ogre.

And once again, there's a bunch of stuff lying on the ground where it vanished.

"...Guess I'll collect it."

It doesn't seem very real, and it all feels a little odd, but since I'm curious about what's dropped, I head to the gate.

I glance around cautiously at my surroundings, quickly gather the dropped items, and Appraise them.

Hell Slime Core—The heart of a Hell Slime. Contains an immense amount of mana and can be crafted into various types of weapons and armor.

Hell Slime Jelly—Coffee-flavored jelly. Eating it increases mana and defense.

Magic Stone: C—Rank C. A special stone that can be harvested from monsters with mana.

"Coffee jelly?! Seriously?!"

I never would've thought I'd find coffee jelly of all things. Not only is it edible, but it's yet another stat booster!

This is also the second time I've gotten a Magic Stone... Will this also be worth a huge chunk of money?

If I'm honest, there's a part of me hoping that's the case. I've been pretty much living hand-to-mouth, so any extra money is always good to have.

Since I don't know how to use the Hell Slime Core, either, I'd rather just exchange it for straight cash as well. That said, I'm planning to keep the Hell Slime Jelly.

As I'm examining the drop items, I notice that I missed something.

"Oh, there's one more."

The item in question is a fashionable silver necklace with some sort of black gem set into a crescent moon.

"Oh wow, jewelry!"

Since I don't know a lot about video games, I'm not sure if it's normal in these kinds of settings for monsters to drop jewelry like this. Was it one of the Hell Slime's possessions when I killed it? If so, that's pretty fancy for a slime.

Now that I think about it, the Bloody Ogre dropped armor... My thoughts were too jumbled at the time to really consider it, but that suggests it's normal to find equipment alongside materials.

Either way, that doesn't change the fact that the Hell Slime dropped it, so I use Appraise.

Necklace of the Black Moon—A rare Hell Slime drop item. The wearer's stats increase at night. Also collects sunlight, converting it to mana and continually replenishing the wearer's mana. Contractor: Yuuya Tenjou.

Oh wow, it's a rare drop.

On second thought, it makes no sense for a slime to be fancy. A little disappointing, honestly.

Still, this looks like a crazy good item. Even if it's only at night, this boosts my stats on top of continually replenishing my mana. Not that I know how to use my mana.

Since it's my first rare drop item, I decide to put it on right away. Incidentally, this is the first time I've ever put on a necklace.

"How do I look?"

I'm the only one around, but the set phrase comes out anyway.

In my old state, I'm sure it would look completely out of place on me. Since I've changed, I hope I don't look too shabby.

While that idle thought crosses my mind, a new message appears.

"You have gained a level. **Detect Presence** skill acquired."

"Huh?"

Wait a minute.

Do I have to suffer that excruciating pain again?! I get that the slime was a higher level than me, so it makes sense that I'd level up. But just because I understand doesn't mean I'm okay with it! I don't want to go through what happened last night ever again!

In an attempt to avoid thinking about it for the moment, I use Appraise on my new skill.

Detect Presence—Can detect the presence of others nearby.

It's a really simple description. Apparently, this lets me sense if someone's lurking nearby, like they do in manga. That's actually really nice.

Since I need to leave the property to gather items, this should keep me out of danger when I'm beyond the barrier.

Happy with my new skill, I turn to my stats.

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 150, **Mana:** 2000, **Attack:** 3500, **Defense:**

3500, **Agility:** 3500, **Intelligence:** 2000, **Luck:** 4500, **BP:** 5000

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, True Art of War: 1, Detect Presence

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

They've gone up quite a bit.

Still, the numbers seem a little too even. Is that just how it's supposed to be? I mean, it's definitely easy to read, but is that on purpose?

"Ah, whatever. Time to spend my BP."

After a moment's thought, I start distributing my BP.

This is the result:

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 150, **Mana:** 2000, **Attack:** 4500, **Defense:** 4500, **Agility:** 4500, **Intelligence:** 2000, **Luck:** 6500, **BP:** 0

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, True Art of War: 1, Detect Presence

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

Unlike last time, I didn't spend any BP on my mana or intelligence.

Instead, I put 2,000 points into luck because of the rare drop item I acquired earlier.

This is just a hunch, but raising my luck stat might increase my chances of getting more rare drops.

Besides, I like the idea of having better luck.

It's been a nonstop stream of excitement since I woke up, and lunchtime is approaching, so I decide to go home for a bit.

When I return to my house, the message about converting items into money pops up again, and I decide to trade in the Magic Stone: C and the Hell Slime Core for more cash.

As a result...

"Items converted. Hell Slime Core—500,000 yen. Magic Stone: C—500,000 yen."

Just like that, I snagged another cool million yen.

I feel a little woozy at the realization that I've made over 2.5 million

yen in just two days, but I manage to make it back to the house and have lunch.

I take the opportunity to use the food growing in the garden.

The menu for lunch ends up being Tomato of Super Strength salad, stewed Pumpkin of Invincibility and Daikon Radish of Great Wisdom, and simmered beef with Potato of God Speed.

I use some Holy Cleansing Water from the Bottomless Watering Can to prepare all the dishes.

The ingredients didn't feel any different from their normal counterparts when I handled them as I made lunch, but I'm still a bit concerned about the flavor.

However, there was no reason to worry.

"I-it's delicious!"

Everything is mind-blowingly tasty.

I'm a mediocre chef at best. That's how I know this amazing flavor is all due to the quality of the ingredients.

I finish my meal and promptly check my stats. Lots of stuff has changed.

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 150, **Mana:** 2500, **Attack:** 5000, **Defense:** 5000, **Agility:** 5000, **Intelligence:** 2500, **Luck:** 7000, **BP:** 0

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, True Art of War: 1, Detect Presence, Cooking: 1

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

"Whoa, they've gone up a ton!"

Yes, my stats increased by 500 each.

And I notice that Cooking has sneaked its way onto my skills list.

The reason my stats went up and the reason I got a new skill is because I used ingredients from the other world.

Man, food in the other world is totally overpowered. I'm jealous... Though, to be fair, I am the one reaping the rewards... I stand by it.

After musing about how broken the ingredients from another world turned out to be, I decide to visit a nearby used bookstore to pick up some reading material on martial arts to make better use of my newly acquired muscle strength.

The used bookstore is better than the library because whenever I go to the library, I always attract stares. In comparison, the bookstore I'm going to is small, and there's hardly ever any people there.

Once I'm ready, I head out and go straight to the used bookstore.

I don't detect anyone nearby on the way, and even after I finally reach the used bookstore, I'm the only customer.

Let's see, the martial arts section...

"Whoa, there's a lot..."

When I stumble onto the bookshelf I'm looking for, I find a huge row of books related to fighting techniques and martial arts waiting for me.

There are the expected books about sword fighting, but there's also a broad selection covering other weapons like spears, quarterstaves, chain-scythes, and even assassination techniques.

...I hope that last one explains where and when I'd be committing an assassination! That's just scary!

I don't know if the library boasts this many offerings, but the only thing that really matters is the fact that all these old books are here.

Now, I'm pretty sure I'm not going to buy every last volume or finish reading them all even if I do buy them, so I stare at the bookshelf for a while, thinking about my next move, when a few books on the shelf suddenly catch my attention.

These books have no obvious unifying theme, each covering different weapons and fighting styles, but for some reason, my instincts are telling me they're the ones I should buy. Maybe my True Art of War skill is influencing my choices?

It's not clear, but buying this particular handful of books isn't a problem, so I bring them to the register without thinking too deeply about it and then go home.

I spend the rest of the day reading until it's time to prepare dinner, after which I resume my studying. By the time I realize how late it's gotten, I notice that I've gained the Speed-Reading skill. That would explain how I finished all of the books I bought that afternoon.

Still, it's way past my bedtime, so I decide to postpone any experiments until tomorrow and crawl into bed.

—And once again, I'm overwhelmed by that excruciating pain and pass out from the sheer agony.

CHAPTER 3

People of a Different World

—One week later.

I have a new appreciation for just how powerful my titles and skills are.

That goes double for the titles Stranger from a Different World and First-Time Traveler to a Different World.

First off, thanks to Stranger from a Different World, I gain levels much more quickly than normal, and all of my levels, skill levels included, are growing at a ridiculous rate...I think. Given that I don't know what a normal person's growth curve looks like, I can't really say for sure.

But what's even more ridiculous is the title First-Time Traveler to a Different World.

It seemed impressive from the very beginning, but each time I gain levels, I'm struck by just how powerful it is.

After all, the BP I gain to spend on my stats at each level up are ten times what a native of this world would receive and five times what a normal person from Earth could expect. That's just ludicrous.

The fact that I'm able to steadily grow stronger is partly due to the sage's house and weapons, but more than that, it's thanks to my titles.

My titles are plenty impressive on their own, but my skills work in my original world, which is just incredibly useful.

For example, the Appraise skill gives me all sorts of information on various objects when I go grocery shopping, which means I can always find the freshest produce. Meanwhile, the Comprehend Languages skill lets me read and write in various foreign languages and even speak fluently in those languages. It's stupid convenient.

Now, while the skills and titles are the most memorable parts of the last week or so, some of my biggest discoveries came from the vegetables growing in the garden.

Over the course of the past several days, I've been regularly

incorporating the stat-raising ingredients into my diet, but once my stats hit a certain amount, the produce stopped increasing them.

This is just a guess, but there's probably a limit to how much those vegetables can boost growth. If anything, it was weird in the first place to get stronger just by eating, so I wasn't too broken up about it. Besides, even if they don't increase my stats, they're still delicious.

Oh, by the way, I did end up trying the Hell Slime Jelly, and guess what? It really did taste like coffee jelly. And yes, it tasted great.

Meanwhile, I learned a lot about my new body through trial and error.

As I practiced with my weapons while using the old books I bought as references, my True Art of War skill went up, which made it clear I didn't need to kill monsters to increase my skill levels. When I consider the fact that this is probably also due to my Stranger from a Different World title, it just emphasizes how powerful the titles are.

And while I didn't notice any big differences in my fighting ability at level 2 versus level 1 of True Art of War, I feel like I'm a little bit sharper when I'm swinging my weapons. It really is just a feeling, though.

But even as I'm learning new things about myself and this new, strange world, I also find myself slowly sinking into a gloomy, anxious state.

That's because the day of reckoning—my first day of high school—is creeping ever closer.

Entering high school means braving a new environment...and to be honest, I feel nothing but anxiety about what's coming.

Ordinarily, the anxiety would be balanced out with the excitement of new experiences, but I'm afraid I don't have the courage to reinvent myself in a school where basically everyone already knows me from middle school. I mean, even if I tried, I'm sure the hazing and bullying would only get worse.

I wish I could just keep exploring this different world, but well, that's not an option.

"Sigh... I don't want to go..."

Is the fact that I'm considering going to high school despite repeating that refrain in my head simply a sign that I'm fundamentally a coward? I'd be better off if I could just muster the courage to stop going to school, but I feel like if I did that, my life as I know it would truly be over... And so ultimately, I can't bring myself to make that leap.

Which is why I'm currently on my way to a store that sells school uniforms to replace my old one that doesn't fit me anymore.

Since the new school year is going to start soon, it shouldn't exactly be rare for people to come order a new uniform, but for some reason,

everyone at the store won't stop staring at me... I didn't leave my fly open, did I?

Fortunately, I'm rewarded for my courage, as there aren't many people out, and I don't run into anyone I know.

Anyway, I'm approaching today with a sense of determination... because today's the day I make my first trip into the area surrounding the cabin in the other world.

It's scary to consider that there might be a bunch of pants-wetting things like Bloody Ogres and Hell Slimes waiting for me, but my curiosity still outweighs my fear.

That kind of mindset would've been unimaginable for the old me, but since I gained a whole bunch of levels, while I wouldn't say I'm confident, I'm at least able to feel a sense of excitement at the prospect of indulging my urge to explore.

I suppose it might look reckless to other people, but I'm honestly happy about that change.

Maybe it'll help me approach life more proactively from now on.

"...Could be a little reckless of me, but let's head out for now."

I'm wearing the Bloodstained Ogre armor such as the Breastplate of the Bloodstained Ogre and the Gauntlets of the Bloodstained Ogre over the clothes that the sage left for me. When I tried putting them on after I lost all that weight, I found out they're the perfect size for me. I'm hoping this grants me a little protection, at least.

Oh, that reminds me, the first time I tried them on, I got almost embarrassingly amped up because it looked so cool... But well, that's normal, right?

I mean, it really does look so damn cool!

Just in case, I'm also carrying some of the Herbs of Complete Healing as a basic precaution. So long as I don't die from the very first blow, this should keep me relatively safe... Or am I'm being too optimistic?

I approach the gate that separates my property from the outside world, near the spot where I killed the two monsters a week earlier, and I stop to take a deep breath.

Weapons? Check. Armor? Check. Herbs of Complete Healing? Check.

"...Okay."

I steel my nerves and set foot outside.

Step by step, I slowly set off my property.

And then—

"Oh..."

I've successfully left the safety of the house.

While the views are the same as behind the fence, it all suddenly looks more colorful, more vibrant, and I stare at my surroundings in

awe for a while.

The reality of my little excursion starts to set in, and I gain confidence with each additional step.

Although the plan today is theoretically to explore the immediate area, I don't have the courage to go too far yet, so I'm planning to avoid losing sight of the house.

I grip my weapon, the Absolute Spear, and forge ahead as I warily keep my head on a swivel.

It's the first time I've studied the trees of this forest up close, and all the leaves in the canopy are shapes I've never seen before.

There's also a wide variety of flowering plants, ranging from those that clearly look poisonous to ones that are rainbow-colored and even some flowers that glow faintly.

...Looking at all of this really drives home the fact that I'm currently in a different world.

As I reach that rather obvious conclusion about this stunning vista, I suddenly notice the presence of a living thing nearby. Seems like my skill Detect Presence is working.

I hold my breath and cautiously approach until I can see the creature in question: a little green humanoid dressed in rough armor. Its sharp, slanted eyes, hooked nose, and mouth full of jagged fangs all combine into a frightening visage. I guess the Bloody Ogre was scarier, though.

I make sure it doesn't see me as I activate Appraise.

Goblin Elite

Level: 120, **Mana:** 100, **Attack:** 1500, **Defense:** 1000, **Agility:** 1500, **Intelligence:** 100, **Luck:** 100

As I suspected, it's a goblin.

But it's not just any goblin. It's an elite. Which makes it's a high-tier goblin, I think? Not gonna lie, kinda jealous.

Putting that aside, what should I do?

I'm definitely stronger when it comes to raw stats.

But is this goblin really an enemy? It's possible that in this world, goblins and humans can peacefully live side by side.

If that's the case, I'd be in the wrong for attacking this one out of the blue. The Bloody Ogre and Hell Slime were very obviously hostile when they tried to force their way onto my property, but I really can't tell one way or the other this time. I feel like because the Bloody Ogre was hostile, there's good odds the goblin is as well, but better to wait and see.

Which is why I try to avoid any unnecessary trouble by sneaking

away from the spot.

Crack.

And in the process, I end up stepping on a twig and making a loud noise.

I hesitantly turn toward the goblin—

“...”

“...”

It’s totally looking right at me.

We stare at each other in silence for a while.

I can’t bear the silence any longer, and I call over it to with a smile.

“H-hello!”

“Grahraaagh!”

“Yeah, I figured!”

Practically on cue, the Goblin Elite charges at me while swinging its rusty sword.

Before my recent experiences, my knees would probably have given out, and I would’ve instantly fallen on my butt. Now I’m able to take the time to carefully gauge the Goblin Elite’s movements and avoid the incoming attack.

“Grah?! Raaagyaa!”

The Goblin Elite appears surprised that I dodged, but it quickly readies another strike, fully intent on killing me.

By now, it’s plain to see that the goblin is, as expected, very hostile.

Now that I know it’s an enemy, I figure there’s nothing wrong with defending myself, so I adjust my grip on the Absolute Spear and recall the contents of one of the books I bought.

The book I read on spear fighting didn’t mention anything about how to hold a spear.

At that point, I wondered if I’d made a mistake in my choice of books, but when I continued reading, I discovered that the book’s policy is that the haft of a spear should be held in whatever grip the user finds most comfortable, and it went on to explain that the basic spear thrust involves twisting the spear as it’s being thrust at the opponent.

In that sense, by boiling it down to just twisting the spear as I thrust forward, the book explained the technique in a way that was easy for a pure beginner like me to understand.

I calmly watch the Goblin Elite as it tries to launch a second attack, and I immediately note that it’s swinging its sword from side to side. Meaning its head and lower body are completely exposed.

Taking advantage of that opening, I calmly use the greater reach of the spear and put my entire body behind my spear thrust, twisting it in my grip as I do so.

A gust of wind spirals around the tip of the spear as it pierces the

goblin's forehead with unerring precision.

"Grah?!"

I've already struck the Goblin Elite, but it seems the wind spiraling around the spear point is also really powerful, because the resulting blast blows away the rest of the head entirely, beheading the monster.

The Goblin Elite's headless body wobbles for a few steps before emitting a geyser of blood from its neck and falling over. Eventually, the corpse begins dissolving into motes of light.

"Phew..."

That's the first time I've felt the raw sensation of killing with a weapon in my hand.

But I find that I'm strangely calm.

It's a horrific sight, the sort of scene where I'd expect to keel over and throw up, but for some reason, I feel unperturbed.

Of course, I do recognize that I've taken a life, and I like to think I understand the significance.

Even then, part of me deep down finds certainty in that it was a kill-or-be-killed situation, and both my body and mind are aligned.

"...The item drops this time are Magic Stone: D, Fang of the Greater Goblin, and Hide of the Greater Goblin... Eh?"

The whole idea of taking a goblin's skin is pretty gross, and as expected, none of it is stuff I know how to use, but I toss all of it into my Item Box.

Oh, that reminds me—it's the first time I've done anything major in this armor, and it didn't hinder my movements at all. Given that I also like the way it looks, this armor gets high marks in every category from me.

Although I originally hoped to avoid a fight, considering that the fight let me confirm a lot of things, maybe running into the goblin was for the best.

"Hrm... Doesn't look I gained a level this time..."

If nothing else, I'm glad I got a chance to try out a technique I learned from those books. It's one thing to try something in the safety of my own yard. It's another thing entirely to do it in actual battle. I'm glad it was useful in a practical way.

I'm in a different world, and the opponents are fantasy monsters, but martial arts from Earth still work against them. I hope things keep going this swimmingly.

"All right, time to continue exploring."

I probably didn't level up because the enemy was fairly close in level to me, so I shift gears and resume exploring the forest.

"Gasp...wheeze..."

A young woman desperately ran through the woods.

However, it was plain to see that the clothing she wore—a finely crafted bone-white dress—wasn't well suited to running.

Her beautiful blond hair, which looked like strands of sunlight filtering through the trees, had become knotted and matted as she ran, losing its regal luster.

“...”

Behind the young woman, a group of several silhouettes in hooded garments followed closely.

“Mmph...!”

The young woman ran barefoot through the rough terrain of the forest.

“Ah?!”

But the combination of her inconvenient clothes and the unforgiving environment finally caught up to her when she tripped on a tree root and fell.

There was no way the mysterious group chasing her would let that opportunity slip by them. They immediately surrounded the young woman.

She clearly recognized that there was nowhere left to run, but she glared defiantly at the hooded figures with her jade eyes anyway.

“You lot! Do you dare to attack me knowing that I'm the first princess of the Kingdom of Arselia?!”

The hooded figures exchanged glances and chuckled at the young woman's defiance.

“Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Of course, Lexia von Arselia. We know exactly who you are.”

“Then why...?”

“Why? What an odd thing to say! You of all people should know why...”

“I—I...”

The young woman—Lexia—found herself at a loss for words.

“You're an eyesore. You and your tainted blood!”

“My blood isn't tainted...!”

“Shut your mouth!”

“Aaah!”

As Lexia held her ground, one of her assailants conjured a hunk of earth and launched it at her.

Lexia immediately rolled to avoid taking a direct hit, but the spell was powerful, and the impact alone did a surprising amount of damage.

“Aaagh...”

“Don't make this such a hassle. You had one simple job—die.”

“A pity about your bodyguards, eh? Getting attacked by us because they just happened to be guarding you.”

“They were so desperate to let you escape, but I bet those knights are facedown in the mud by now.”

As Lexia doubled over in pain, her assailants peppered her with taunts.

Lexia was the oldest of the king’s children, but she was the child of a concubine—a slave.

Further, her mother wasn’t human.

Lexia’s mother had been a high elf, a particularly attractive group even among the ethereal elven races.

The king had fallen in love at first sight after laying eyes on a high elf slave, declared his love for her, and took her as his mistress. Lexia had been born as a result of that relationship.

But Lexia’s mother had died shortly after childbirth.

The king grieved her death and raised Lexia as a precious memento of his departed love.

—However, a certain incident had changed Lexia’s life forever.

As a half-elf with high elven blood, Lexia had inherited both her mother’s beauty and her people’s powerful aptitude for magic, and one day, she lost control of her mana.

As a result, the first prince, who had been standing near her at the time, had been badly injured.

Fortunately, the prince had recovered without any lasting debilitations or scars. However, this earned Lexia the ire of the prince’s mother, the queen, as well as all the nobles who supported the first prince.

Due to the circumstances of her birth, she had always been teased and bullied by them outside the king’s watchful gaze.

“Sob... Aaagh...”

Lexia was grateful to her mother for giving birth to her, and she held no ill will toward her father.

Yet so many mercilessly attacked her.

Even being born royalty could, depending on the circumstances, end up being a curse rather than a blessing.

She couldn’t do anything to change what had happened, and she had strived to live without letting her tribulations break her, but with death staring her in the face, Lexia couldn’t help but break out in tears as she reflected on her lot in life.

If she had only lived a more normal life... That lone thought came unbidden.

“I’m not about to waste time on pointless chitchat until we get attacked by monsters... Go ahead and die already.”

Lexia choked back her sobs, crying silently at her own misery, at the hopeless situation she found herself in.

Then, just as one of her assailants was about to mercilessly finish

her off with a spell...

“Raaaagh!”

“Wha—?! A Goblin General?!”

A monster suddenly set upon Lexia’s assailants.

Golden reptilian eyes and burnt-brown skin.

With its muscular limbs, a height no different from a grown man, and its finely made armor, the monster gave off an intimidating aura.

It exhaled sharply through its hooked nose and swung wildly with a greatsword as long as its wielder was tall.

The resulting blow was overwhelming, and the hooded figures who tried to bring magic to bear against the Goblin General were reduced to piles of gore with a single swing.

“Aaah?!”

The men who had been so intent on killing her had been slaughtered in an instant.

Lexia’s expression twisted in terror, and though she tried to get up and run, her legs wouldn’t obey her.

As Lexia stayed frozen in fear, the Goblin General used its overwhelming strength to massacre the entire group of hooded assassins.

The surrounding forest was now spattered with blood and gore, with the bloodstained Goblin General standing in the middle.

—It was futile to resist its staggering strength.



Lexia's body suddenly refused to listen to her commands.

Having finished butchering the hooded figures, the Goblin General turned its gaze toward Lexia, who was gripped by terror and despair.

Caught in its sharp gaze, Lexia surrendered even her will to live.

"Ah..."

As Lexia stared in a terrified stupor, the monster slowly approached.

Once it stopped in front of her, the Goblin General raised its giant sword.

"Graaaaah!"

She would die here. She probably wouldn't even so much as feel it.

Giving up on any hope of living, Lexia was simply staring at the sword that was about to end her life like it was happening to someone else.

"Yaaaaah!"

"Gruah?!"

Suddenly, something flew at the Goblin General.

But the Goblin General had detected the projectile before it hit, raising its greatsword to deflect it.

However, that wasn't the only attack.

A second impact slammed into the greatsword that had blocked the projectile.

The impact was so great that even the powerful Goblin General couldn't stand its ground, getting thrown backward by the force of the blow.

Facing the new challenger, the Goblin General regained its footing; glaring in fury, it let out an enraged roar.

"Grrr... Graaaaah!"

Lexia's gaze followed the Goblin General's eyes and saw—

"—You okay?!"

—silken black hair and eyes that brought the night sky to mind. She saw a young man with an elegant and oddly foreign air hurriedly approaching her.

It was still a desperate situation, but for some reason, Lexia felt a sudden surge of hope, of relief at the young man's presence.

That relief was enough to break the tension that had been coiled up within her, and Lexia fainted.

It's been a few days since I fought the Goblin Elite.

I've made a fair bit of progress on my exploration in those days, and I picked up a useful skill on the way, making it unnecessary to leave marks of my progress through the woods.

Not only did I learn a new skill, I also fought new monsters and increased both my level and my fighting technique. And by converting the items those monsters dropped, I'd also made a fair bit of money

along the way.

Hence my current stats are:

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 200, **Mana:** 5000, **Attack:** 7000, **Defense:** 7000, **Agility:** 7000, **Intelligence:** 4500, **Luck:** 7500, **BP:** 0

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, True Art of War: 4, Detect Presence, Cooking: 3, Speed Reading, Map, Dodge, Detect Weakness, One with Nature

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

I gained more levels than I expected, so I keep having to deal with that agonizing pain while I sleep, but I'm starting to get used to it... Or rather, I think that pain and strange noises are gone now.

My guess is that my body's finished being rebuilt, maybe. Like there isn't any more room for any modifications.

Still, I'm clearly getting stronger, so it's not that my growth has completely stopped. Probably nothing to worry about. If anything, I'm glad I don't have to deal with that pain anymore.

As for the new skills, their effects look like this:

Map—Automatically maps locations that have been visited.

Dodge—Makes it easier to avoid enemy attacks.

Detect Weakness—Can find the weaknesses of an enemy.

One with Nature—Become one with nature and erases your presence and mana.

They're all really useful, and the Map skill, in particular, makes it much easier to go around exploring.

Dodge gives me the ability to see what timing the enemy is going to attack at, while Detect Weakness lets me see where I should attack to do the most damage. I guess I picked up One with Nature because I was hiding to observe monsters, and it's really come in handy.

The skills are all really helpful for me, since I have no real personal experience with fighting. Thanks to their benefits, even I've been able to take on my opponents from the front.

As for the item drops from all of the fighting, I converted it all into money, and thanks to that, I'm up to 10 million yen, which I'm storing in my Item Box.

I don't own anything like a computer, and they seem useful, so I'm hoping to buy one with this money.

But all that aside, high school is about to start soon.

Meaning it'll be back to the hellish days of bullying and hazing...

More than anything, I'm going to miss all the free time. Classes starting up again will make it a lot harder to go exploring.

I've been studying, of course, but even then, going to school is just painful for me.

"Sigh... Guess I should get over it. It's a waste to dwell on school when I'm in such a fun place..."

I know I'm just avoiding facing my reality, but I temporarily push thoughts of school out of my head.

Better to just start my daily routine of exploring the other world, since this routine is probably going to end once school starts.

I have the Absolute Spear in my hand, but I've also been fighting with the other weapons and my bare hands. It's just that the spear seems to fit me best, so I have it out by default. Though I use the Omnisword pretty often, too.

I wander the woods for a while, but there's no sign of any monsters.

Still, it's not completely fruitless. I pick up various odd mushrooms and fruits growing on the trees, Appraising them and tossing them into my Item Box. Sometimes, I can convert them into money, and others, I just eat.

Whatever's left over, I can take home to Earth.

This world has turned into a bit of a food warehouse for me. Oh, that reminds me, when I killed a bipedal pig monster called an Orc Elite, it dropped Greater Pigman Meat. I tried eating it, and it was delicious. Of course, that was only after I Appraised it to make sure it was harmless.

So drop items are not just a source of income, but also a source of food for me. I'm grateful for that fact, since this means I don't have to go outside to go grocery shopping. It's a real time-saver.

After spending a little while wandering around and foraging in the woods, I hear sounds of intense fighting in the distance.

"What is that?"

Surprised at just how loud the battle seems, I cautiously head in the direction of the noises.

"Ah?!"

When I get there, I see a blood-splattered monster that looks like a bigger, stronger Goblin Elite.

A closer look shows there's chunks of what looks like meat and gore splattered around it.

I fall silent at the sheer horror show that's on display here, but I immediately return to my senses and activate Appraise.

Level: 200, **Mana:** 1000, **Attack:** 9000, **Defense:** 3000, **Agility:** 500, **Intelligence:** 500, **Luck:** 100

Evidently, the rank above elite is general. Moreover, it's the first time I've run into this monster.

My stats are more balanced, but that thing's got a ridiculous attack value.

I don't know what set it off, but I should probably wait and see what it's doing. I'd rather take a little bit more time fighting things with lower stats and gain some more combat experience first.

Having made that decision, I get ready to quietly leave the area.

But...

"Wait, what?!"

I spot a girl around my age sitting on the ground in the direction the Goblin General is heading.

Her dress looks pretty expensive, and I have no idea what she's doing in these woods, but she's the first person I've seen in this world... Ordinarily, that's a cause for celebration, but now's definitely not the time for that.

The moment the Goblin General draws back its sword, I quickly throw my Absolute Spear.

"Yaaaaaah!"

"Gruah?!"

The Goblin General immediately notices the Absolute Spear flying straight at it and blocks with the sword it was preparing to swing.

I use that opening to sprint forward at full speed and hurl all my weight forward, landing a jump kick on the Goblin General's sword.

"Hyah!"

"Grah?!"

Since I charged into it at a dead sprint, the impact knocks the Goblin General back quite a distance.

As I land, I collect the Absolute Spear when it returns to my hand and approach the girl.

"—You okay?!"

The moment I call over to her, she looks at me with an expression of surprise, then collapses in like a rag doll.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!"

For a moment, I panic, suspecting the worst, but upon closer examination, she's clearly still breathing. Guess she's simply out cold.

As I breathe a sigh of relief, I feel an intense stare burrowing into me. I turn to face my adversary.

Sure enough, the Goblin General is glaring intently at me.

I adjust my grip on the Absolute Spear and face the Goblin General.

"..."

“...”

We both ready our weapons and search for an opening.

But just as I can't find any obvious gaps in the Goblin General's defense, it seems it can't find any in mine, either, and we remain locked in a silent standoff.

“Grrr... Graaaaah!”

Finally, the Goblin General loses its patience, advancing with a ground-shattering step while sweeping its sword sideways.

When I see its attack, my instinct tells me that trying to block would be a mistake, so I pick up the unconscious girl and quickly leap away instead.

I immediately set the girl on the ground and then charge at the Goblin General.

“Hyaaah!”

“Graaah!”

However, the Goblin General easily blocks my thrust.

Following up, it pours all its strength into its arms, fully intending to hurl me away with brute force.

“Guh!”

The sheer strength of the attack launches me into the air.

I almost slam into the trees behind me, but I somehow correct my course and land on safely on one of them instead.

“Oh boy...”

A cold shiver runs up my spine at the Goblin General's demonstration of strength.

Given its high attack stat, if I try to go toe to toe with it, I'm going to lose.

If I wanna win, I need to find an opening.

Fortunately, I have much higher stats in everything other than attack. I need to make the most of that and the large variety of weapons I have at my disposal.

I immediately use the tree as a springboard and lunge once more at the Goblin General.

The Goblin General holds its giant sword like a baseball bat, gauging the timing in the hopes of cutting me down while I'm still in midair.

If I had charged straight forward, it probably would have killed me right then and there.

But right before I enter the Goblin General's range, I stab my Absolute Spear into the ground.

“Graaah?!”

The Goblin General's sword whistles through empty air as I come to a sudden stop.

Using the Absolute Spear like a pole-vaulter, I launch myself high

up.

As I pass over the Goblin General's head, I draw the Void Bow from my Item Box and launch an invisible arrow.

However, the Goblin General detects the attack and uses the momentum from its initial swing to bring its big sword upward, successfully blocking the arrow.

But that attack has left the monster vulnerable for a brief moment. I land on another tree, using it as a solid platform to hurl the Absolute Spear that's returned to my hand.

"Guh... Gugugah."

The Goblin General somehow manages to block that attack as well, contorting its body painfully.

—But I have one more attack up my sleeve.

The moment I threw the Absolute Spear, I used the tree trunk to once again launch myself at the Goblin General.

And in my right hand, I have the Omnisword.

"Grah?!"

The Goblin General finally notices my approach and moves desperately to defend itself, but...

"Too slow...!"

"Graaaaaah!"

I complete my lunge and split the Goblin General in two with my sword.

The Goblin General then slowly collapses, disappearing into particles of light.

Once I confirm the Goblin General is dead, I turn my gaze to the unconscious girl still lying where I left her.

"What...should I do with her...?"

As I'm wondering what would be best in this situation, a message pops up in front of me.

"You have gained a level."

Oh, gotcha.

I quickly gather the Goblin General's drop items, then approach the girl.

She's dressed in fine clothes that are completely out of place in woods like these. Honestly, this is the first time I've actually seen someone wearing a dress...

Right as I'm seriously wondering what I'm supposed to do, I feel someone's presence approaching.

"—ness! Your Highness! Princess Lexia!"

Whoever it is, they're getting closer, and I hear something that sounds like a human voice.

Oh, Lexia... Is that her name?

I think about that before glancing around and remembering the area is a veritable splatter horror show... Yeah, it's pretty gruesome, but not enough to make me throw up.

Still, this scene is so bad that I can only imagine some really terrible misunderstandings arising if the people looking for this princess find me standing here...

...Time to hide.

I hurriedly leap into some nearby bushes and activate my One with Nature skill.

Soon after, a group of what looks like soldiers approaches, bristling with weapons and ready for a fight.

They're all wearing similar armor, and the middle-aged man with a black cape over his armor stares in mute shock at the scene.

"Wh-what...?!"

I'm glad I didn't wait around out in the open. They're all on high alert now.

The soldiers, warily checking their surroundings, immediately notice the girl passed out at the base of the tree.

"Y-Your Highness!"

The soldiers hurriedly rush over to check on her condition.

Then one of the soldiers briefly murmurs something, emitting a faint white light from his right hand and gently pressing it to her body.

Wait, is that...magic?! Whoa! Awesome!

While I'm getting all worked up by my first encounter with magic, the soldiers let out deep sighs of relief.

"I just cast a healing spell on her, so she should be fine now. It appears she's only unconscious."

"Oh, thank the gods... I'm glad it's nothing serious..."

The soldiers seem relieved to find her safe, but they waste no time gently picking her up and warily watch their surroundings as they prepare to leave.

"...I'd like to know what's happened here, but we shouldn't tarry. Time to make our way home."

"Yes, sir!"

At the middle-aged knight's urging, the rest of them answer crisply and quickly set off from the area.

After watching them leave, I let out a breath of relief.

"Phew... I was cutting it pretty close there for a while, but it looks like everything's working out well..."

It was a bit of a blur, but still, this is the first time I've run into anyone from this world... I didn't get to talk to them, though.

CHAPTER 4

Life Changes

Today is the day—the first day of high school.

I ended up spending my entire spring break gathering drop items in the other world, so I haven't interviewed for any part-time jobs.

Since I can actually take care of all my needs with that world's house, I pretty much never went out on this side over the whole break.

Fortunately, thanks to the fact that I kept converting the item drops, I have a scary amount of money on hand, but...I'm still too scared to take it out of the Item Box.

As for my stats, this is what they currently look like:

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 233, **Mana:** 5880, **Attack:** 7880, **Defense:** 7880, **Agility:** 7880, **Intelligence:** 5380, **Luck:** 8380, **BP:** 0

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, True Art of War: 6, Detect Presence, Cooking: 5, Speed Reading, Map, Dodge, Detect Weakness, One with Nature

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

I've gone up in both normal levels and skill levels. True Art of War has also grown to the point where I can easily pull off the sorts of moves you only see in manga, so I can't help but laugh at the ridiculousness of it all.

The books I bought are now helping me gain a better understanding of True Art of War, too.

All that said, I still can't use any magic.

Now, as for the items the Goblin General dropped, the fact that it dropped a Magic Stone: A was enough to tell me that it was an A-class

monster. It didn't drop anything else particularly of note. Of course, I almost fainted when I saw an A-rank Magic Stone was worth 5 million yen.

There's a lot to think back on, but it's not like I can return to that time, and the high school entrance ceremony is finally upon me.

"Sigh... I wish I didn't have to go..."

However, not going isn't an option. Plus, it's the entrance ceremony.

No matter how much I get harassed in class, I'm still paying tuition to attend, and more importantly, I can't see a future for myself if I don't study.

"...Okay, let's go."

No matter how much I try to cheer myself up, I just can't seem to banish the cloud hanging over my heart. I reluctantly put on my brand-new uniform and trudge out the door with heavy steps.

...Um, what's going on?

"Wh-whoa, that guy..."

"Is he a transfer student?"

"Wow... He's got long legs..."

"N-never mind that. He's totally hot."

"Is he a model, maybe?"

"I've never seen anyone that handsome before..."

As I leave the house and head to school with my collection of dark thoughts, I can feel everyone's eyes on me. I'm not just imagining it, right?

I don't know the reason, but getting stared at doesn't do it for me, so it's really uncomfortable.

To be fair, people have always kind of looked down on me, so I'm used to that, but...this feels like a different kind of attention. What's going on here?

Usually, I get teased or, on the really bad days, get punched or kicked or have people rob me on the way to school. No one's doing anything of the sort today.

I'm still confused when I arrive at school.

They've posted up the class rosters at the entrance, and I struggle to get a better view. The moment someone notices I'm here, their initial surprise becomes contagious, and suddenly, I'm standing alone. I'm not Moses parting the Red Sea here.

Still, I might as well take advantage of the fact that people are avoiding me, so I go up and check the board. I spot my main tormentor's name, Araki, on the class roster.

Yeah, I get that we went to the same middle school, but I was hoping there was a chance we'd be in different classes... Dammit... This is going to suck...

I leave the entrance and head directly to the school gym with an unshakable sense of hopelessness.

The entrance ceremony is going to be held at the gym before we all report to our new classrooms for introductions.

When I get to the gym, which has been set up for the entrance ceremony, I'm still getting those peculiar looks from people around me, but oddly, no one comes to pick on me, and the ceremony ends uneventfully.

Yeah, I realize that's how entrance ceremonies go for most people.

At any rate, once the entrance ceremony is over, the schedule says we're supposed to get an orientation about the high school in our classrooms, and there's a long homeroom session with a short lunch break in between before we're dismissed for the day.

While going over the schedule in my head, I make my way to the classroom, and my mood grows gloomier with each step.

Sigh... This is the worst...

Inside the classroom, just like I feared, people stare at me again. I try my best to ignore them as I sit in an empty seat.

As soon as I sit down in the new classroom, Araki wastes no time coming up to me.

"Hey."

"Huh?! Wh-what is it?"

I answer anxiously, and Araki peers at me suspiciously before asking, "Who the hell are you? You're a new face. You a transfer student?"

"Huh? Um... It's me, Yuuya Tenjou..."

".....Say what?"

Araki stares at me with a dumbfounded look I've never seen on his face before.

But it's not just Araki. For some reason, everyone else in the classroom is wearing a similar expression.

"That's not funny. There's no way you're that pig. You gotta be a transfer student, right?"

"N-no, it's me, honest..."

"There's no freaking way. That doesn't make any sense."

Araki raises his voice in denial.

I can't help but cringe at the rise in volume, but it seems Araki's not the only one who doesn't believe me. Everyone's staring at me, wide-eyed.

"Eh? So what the hell? You saying...you got some work done?"

"N-no, I don't have that sort of money. I did work hard to lose weight during spring break, though."

Okay, so the truth is that I lost weight by leveling up, but since that involved fighting monsters, I think it's acceptable to call that working

hard, right?

Even though I'm telling the truth, Araki's still too shocked to respond.

When I glance around, everyone else has the same expression.

Araki eventually comes to his senses and tries to say something, but the teacher walks in before he gets a chance, so Araki can only suck his teeth in frustration and return to his seat.

"...Huh?"

Class lets out for the lunch break.

Since I'm always being bullied during breaks, I go out of my way to find a bathroom no one else is using so I can at least go to the toilet in peace. This winds up being the first time I see my own reflection in the mirror, stopping me dead in my tracks.

Strangely, Araki and his cronies left me alone for most of the morning, and the day has been surprisingly peaceful. I mean, it's almost scary in its own way, since I don't know how long that peace will last, but...

Never mind that. This thing that's supposedly my face is a much bigger issue.

"Is this...really me...?"

The reflection in the mirror—a face that looks nothing like my old face—just stares back in shock.

My face is smooth, without a single one of the zits that plagued me before. My thinning hair has grown into a thick, full head of silky hair. My gill-like jaw is now well defined, and my thin lips are much fuller. My piglike nose is now slim and elegant.

There's not a single trace of my old appearance, and I can't help but gingerly touch my own face to check. Yeah, it's my face for sure.

...

"Whooooaaaaa!"

I can't help but let out a cry of surprise.

Yeah, who the heck is this?! Me? Is it really me?!

All of the features that had so tormented are all gone.

I stare blankly as I touch my face while everything falls into place in my mind.

"...Yeah, this much change would shock just about anyone..."

This must be one of the benefits to leveling up. My current face is a huge improvement over my old one.

"Maybe people won't think I'm creepy with this new face..."

It's hard to give an objective opinion of my own face.

More than anything, I really hated my face and appearance.

So I'm honestly just happy that I look presentable now. Still, I suppose people who know me from before would still find me creepy.

“...But I don't need to keep my head down when I walk like I'm hiding my face, right...?”

At least now, my face is presentable enough to show people.

It still doesn't feel quite real as I stare in the mirror, but I remember that the lunch break's about to end and hurriedly return to the classroom.

My steps feel much lighter, as if a huge weight has been lifted from my shoulders.

“...Time really flew by...”

This last week...

No one, Araki included, harassed me for the whole week!

They all just kind of gaze at me from a distance and refuse to talk to me. Even Araki's holding back, so I guess I must have changed a lot.

In addition to this rare and precious newfound peace, I also made a couple of discoveries this week.

The Comprehend Languages skill works for English, so English class was a piece of cake. Which is great. I used to be absolute garbage at English.

The week felt like it had gone by in a blur, but today is a long-awaited day off. I need to enjoy myself. That said, chores are going to take up a good chunk of my time.

“Well, I can't just keep wearing the same clothes...”

The clothes I'm wearing are the clothes I acquired in the other world, and right now, I don't have any other clothes that fit my current body other than my uniform and gym clothes.

I don't have any special interest in fashion, and it's not like I've got an eye for that sort of thing, either, but even I don't want to be wearing the same clothes all the time.

I mean, I'm washing all my clothes, but since I always look the same, it probably comes off a bit unhygienic to other people.

But I've never liked going out into town.

That's because everyone always looks down on me when I'm walking down the street, and sometimes gangs of delinquents corner me for a good ol' fashioned beatdown.

Still, since I don't have a computer or anything at my house, I can't order things easily over the internet, meaning I have to go out to buy the things I need.

“I'm okay on groceries, but I'm running out of other necessities.”

I let out a heavy sigh, but no matter how long I put it off, the fact that I need to go shopping isn't going to change. I grudgingly leave home without much enthusiasm.

“Daily necessities are one thing, but what about something new to wear?”

My mind is on what clothes I should buy as I head into the city.

I've got about 50,000 yen from my Item Box in my wallet, so I should have enough.

"It used to be easy to pick clothes, since I didn't have a lot of choices, but now... And it'd be weird to just wear the same clothes all the time..."

Since I don't know where to buy regular clothes, I put it off a little bit longer and decide to hunt down daily necessities first.

"Let's see... I think I've stocked up on everything I need."

I finish up my first objective of stocking up on everything I'd run out of.

There's a big shopping mall in the city, and since I can find most things here, I always come here for major shopping trips.

...Of course, that convenience always comes with a price. Someone inevitably picks on me while I'm here.

Besides, it's never fun for me to be in a place with a lot of people.

But this time, things are different.

Armed with my new appearance, I don't feel the need to stare at the ground anymore.

With my tiny bit of newfound confidence, I actually find myself looking straight ahead while walking for once.

"H-hey, check out that guy..."

"Wow, who is that?! Is that some celebrity?!"

"Handsome and crazy fit. He's hot..."

"He's way too sexy!"

"Now that I think about it, I think I heard that a fashion magazine is supposed to be having a photo shoot around here..."

"L-let's try talking to him."

"Huh? You can't be serious?!"

I notice that an awful lot of people seem to be whispering around me, but I'm still surprised when a bunch of women I've never met call out to me.

"H-hey, you."

"Me?!"

I'm shocked that several women are coming up to me rather than the usual delinquents.

"Yeah, you. If you don't have any plans, we'd love it if you could come hang out with us for a while."

"Totally. You're free, right?"

"Erm, um..."

What is this? Some sort of new sales tactic?

I try to calm my rattled nerves and somehow manage to politely decline their invitation.

Okay, so apparently, the trick in this sort of situation is to make sure you look apologetic when saying no so they don't get too upset! I mean, my old self probably wouldn't have been able to pull it off, but I'm capable of that much now...I think!

"I'm sorry... I have plans..."

I put on the most regretful expression possible, and the women stare for a moment before they hurriedly reply.

"I-it's totally fine. Don't worry about it!"

"Yup, yup. Sorry to bother you!"

I think they noticed my sincerity and left me to go about my day.

Phew! I'm pretty sure my old self would've gotten the cops called on me, or they would've laid into me with all sorts of awful insults.

As I continue on with a sigh of relief, I once again hear some whispering behind me.

"...Wow, did you see his face just now? I died."

"...Same."

"I thought he was the cool type...but then he puts on that puppy dog look..."

""""He's dangerous.""""

"Huh?!"

I feel a shiver run up my spine. Wh-what was that?

"A-anyway, where should I buy clothes...?" I murmur to myself as I continue wandering the shopping mall.

When I came here, I did check the men's fashion floor, but there's too many brands, and I don't have the faintest clue of where to start.

"I've basically never had anything to do with fashion till now... And it's not like I ever had the money to dress up even if I wanted to."

Of course, my current clothes are a little too simple.

After all, I'm just dressed in a white collared shirt and black slacks.

Other than that, there's just the blue-hued black leather shoes and the Necklace of the Black Moon I got as a rare drop from the Hell Slime.

Yeah, thinking about it some more, this is as far from fashionable as you can get. But the clothes themselves are really high quality, which keeps my outfit from looking totally unfashionable or anything, but still.

As I'm wandering around the shopping center, I suddenly hear someone yelling.

"Hey! Just how long are you going to make us wait?!"

"Please excuse me! My deepest apologies!"

"I don't want your apologies! We've been here for over an hour! You've got some nerve making me wait."

"My apologies. I'm so very sorry...!"

"Um...Hikaru, please don't feel bad on my account."

“Oh, Miu! Don’t let them take advantage of you! When someone oversleeps and ends up being late, they’re absolutely the one in the wrong!”

“W-well, yes, that’s true, but...”

“Not only that, but the reason they’re late is because they’re hungover and they’re not even offering any apologies... We have every right to be mad! ...By contrast, you’re such a sweetheart, Miu. Despite your fame, you haven’t let it go to your head... I wish we could make that tardy asshole take a lesson or two about professionalism from you!”

“Heh, heh-heh-heh...”

As I turn to look in the direction of the shouting, I see a big muscular man dressed in a flashy pink shirt yelling at a thoroughly cowed man in a suit.

Behind them, a woman with soft, wavy brown hair and a beauty that’s clear to see even from this distance is doing her best to calm the muscular man.

...Wow, what a chaotic scene.

When I look closely, I see that the muscular man is holding a camera, and there seems to be, uh, what I think looks like photography equipment set up all around them.

I guess it’s a shoot of some sort? Evidently, it’s pretty common to see famous people around here, so maybe they’re shooting a TV show or something?

A closer look reveals there’s a bunch of normal people gathered around them, so it’s evidently a much bigger deal than I first assumed.

Hmm, is that lady an actress, maybe? Based on everyone’s reactions, she seems like someone famous.

Since I don’t have a TV at home, I don’t know the first thing about celebrities, so I haven’t the slightest clue who that could be.

“Well, it doesn’t look like checking out that store is an option with all the commotion, so maybe I’ll look for clothes somewhere else.”

I turn my back on the shoot and get ready to leave.

“I’ve got a schedule to keep. You know that, right, darling? I hate to do this, but I’m going to shoot this with just Miu.”

“P-please don’t!”

“Don’t give me that! You’re a professional! Deal with the consequences! It’s not like I’m saying I won’t use any of your models in the future. Though I’m sure as hell never using that late asshole again.”

“V-very well...”

“Still, this is a pickle, isn’t it? Today’s shoot was supposed to pair Miu with a male model for some modern couples’ outfits, but... Hey, given the circumstances, we could just use a normal person in this

mall. You have all the sizes for the clothes, right?”

“Yes, I brought all of them just in case!”

“Okay, then... Oh, how about that man over there? Hey! You, over there!”

Of course, “somewhere else” isn’t a real location and not really helpful since all these clothing stores look the same to me. Maybe I really do have an awful sense of fashion.

“You, the guy in deep thought about something!”

...Hmm? I feel like someone’s talking to me...

I start looking around curiously when I hear a voice coming from behind me.

“Yes! You, darling, the one looking around! Have a minute?”

“Huh?”

When I turn around to find out where that voice is coming from, the muscular man in the super-fancy shirt takes a good look at me and freezes.

He’s not the only one. The other person who looks like he’s part of the shooting crew and the pretty girl also go still when they see me.

For a moment, I thought they weren’t talking to me, but for some reason, I’m the only one standing here, and everyone else has backed away as though to watch events unfold... But why?!

I don’t know why they froze up like that, but it seems like they want something from me, so I head over.

“Um, can I help you?” I ask the muscular man who stands out most in the group, and for some reason, I think I just saw a lightning bolt strike him. What the heck is happening here?

Now it’s my turn to freeze in surprise, but he suddenly reaches over and grabs me by both hands.

“You! Will you help with our photo shoot?!”

“...Excuse me?”

That was the only response I could squeeze out.

—Wait, someone please explain what’s going on!

“Okaaay! Beautiful! Yes, yes! Oh, show me a little more sexiness, darling! Yes, look off to the side! To! The! Side!”

Nope, still doesn’t seem real to me.

I come to the shopping mall to buy clothes, and for some reason, I’ve been asked to act like a model... Actually, this is just straight up modeling.

And it’s not just me. I’m shooting with an incredibly beautiful woman.

“Yuuya! Your expression’s a bit stiff, honey! Smile! Smile!”

You make it sound so easy!

I fully realize my expression’s even stiffer now than ever. As I try to

think about how to deal with this, the woman I'm modeling with—Miu—turns to me with an easy smile.

"Yuuya, it's perfectly natural to be nervous on your first shoot, so try to not let it bother you."

"R-right, of course."

I take a deep breath to calm down, then look at myself.

Currently, I'm no longer dressed in my simple shirt and slacks. Instead, I'm wearing a white drape shirt with a thin black half-sleeved cardigan over it, paired with claret-colored skinny pants.

They're all things I've never worn before, and it's not so much the shoot as the clothes that's got me feeling anxious.

It's then that I realize there's a ton of people around us.

I guess they're all passersby who've come to this mall to shop, but right now, they're watching Miu and me model for this photo shoot from a distance.

There's a few people with their smartphones out, so I can only assume they're taking pictures?

"Whoa! First time I've seen Miu in the flesh!"

"Miu's adorable as always, but who's the boy next to her?! He's super hot!"

"He's probably a model. I mean, he's with Miu. Besides, check out his face and body. There's no way he isn't a model..."

"Seriously?! Then I need to find the magazines he's in!"

Yeah, it makes sense that shooting in a big mall like this would draw a lot of attention.

"Now, can you two link arms?"

"Huh?"

The photographer gives us a new prompt while I'm preoccupied by the spectators. Link...arms?

What, am I supposed to stand with my arms crossed or something?

As I hurriedly try to decipher the instructions, Miu gently loops her left arm around my right.

"Ummm?!"

"Yuuya? Are you all right?"

"Huh? No, i-it's nothing!"

Actually, it's not nothing!

Is this what he meant by linking arms?! I thought he meant to cross my arms like I'm deep in thought!

Since this is my first experience being this close to a girl, I'm even tenser than I was earlier.

N-no, calm down. We're currently in the middle of a shoot. I need to somehow regain my composure...

Evidently, the theme of this shoot is a modern couple, so I should do something along those lines—on second thought, nope! Not possible!

I'm already at the end of my rope. I don't have the mental fortitude to think about that on top of everything else! More importantly, I can't even imagine what I'm supposed to do in that sort of situation to begin with!

Still, I'm a little calmer than I was earlier—

In the middle of that thought, I realize something. No, I can't help but realize something.

"Hmm? What is it, Yuuya? You're even stiffer than before."

"A-a-are you sure?! I-I-I'm feeling perfectly normal!"

"Yeah, that's not normal."

Hikaru says that with a restrained laugh, but...I can't help it!

I mean...Miu's, um...chest is...!

"Yuuya?"

"It's pressed right up against me!"

"Huh?"

"Oh, uhhh, nothing! Never mind! Yes!"

I can't help but blurt it out, but...well, Miu's breasts are brushing up against my arm! My aaaaarm!

Can she not tell?! I steal a glance at her face to check, but all I see is a professional model posing for the shoot.

...This isn't a question of whether she knows or not.

After taking in Miu's serious but natural expression, I find myself calming down quite a bit.

I can think about this later. I need to focus on the shoot for now.

I switch gears as Hikaru starts directing us to take new poses.

"Alllll right, now. Miu, wrap your arms around Yuuya's neck."

"Bwah?"

"Okay!"

Completely ignoring my shock, Miu wraps her arms around my neck without hesitation and poses.

...I just can't. Unlike earlier when it was just arms, now I'm feeling all sorts of things in all sorts of places! Aaah!

Just when I got my head in the game, in the end, my expression and body are even stiffer than earlier.

I do my best to calm down as we shift into a variety of other poses afterward, but since I can't really calm down that entire time, they decide to call for a break.

"Phew..."

"Good work."

"Th-thank you, you too."

"May I sit next to you?"

"Oh yes! Of course!"

I'm sitting on the bench at the mall to catch my breath when Miu approaches me to talk.

Miu settles onto the bench next to me, and I just say what I'm thinking.

"You're really impressive, Miu."

"Huh?"

Miu is surprised by my sudden compliment.

"I've never worn clothes like this... In fact, up until very recently, I've been living a life where I never even thought about fashion. That's why I never really imagined what it's like to be a model in a fashion magazine, but... Well, even with just this short experience today, I'm starting to understand just how hard it can be."

"Oh no... It's just a matter of getting used to it! When I started, I made so many mistakes, and I got yelled at a lot!"

"Even so, I think it's something that would be hard for me. I didn't think I'd be asked to make specific expressions on top of all the posing."

"Ah-ha-ha-ha... Hikaru is well-known in the industry for obsessing over little details like facial expressions."

The super-muscular guy in the flashy, almost gawdy pink shirt is Hikaru, and it turns out he's a photographer. He doesn't look the part at all.



“Oh... But at this rate...”

The shoot itself has been a blow to my confidence, but seeing Miu handling so much despite being about the same age as me is a reminder of just how little I can do.

I think I'm slowly getting a better mindset about things, but I've still got a long way to go.

It seems my anxiety shows in my expression, because Miu is gently comforting me.

“Yuuya, there's no need to rush into anything. Just do things slowly...at your own pace. Please feel more confident in yourself! Besides, I'm enjoying our shoot today, Yuuya...so I hope you feel the same way.”

“Oh...”

“I mean, it's not just photo shoots. Everything's better if you enjoy it, right?”

“...Enjoy... Hmm...”

Until recently, I didn't have the emotional bandwidth to enjoy much of anything.

I was just so busy surviving that every day was a constant struggle.

But things are different now.

Ever since I found that door to another world, I've...

“Am I...allowed to enjoy things, too...?”

“Yes, of course!”

As Miu smiles gently at me, I find my features relaxing into a natural smile of my own.

“Photo oooooooooop!”

I hear an odd voice from the distance, but in the end, I didn't understand what happened.

“Thank you! You were a lifesaver!”

“O-oh, no. I'm glad I was of help, but... Are you sure I was useful?”

We end up not resuming the shoot after the break.

Instead, Hikaru simply offers me words of thanks with a content look on his face.

...I mean, if a professional is telling me it's all good, then who am I to argue?

I am curious what pictures they're going to use, though. Since I haven't seen any of them, I won't really get a chance to know ahead of time.

As I'm thinking about all that, Hikaru suddenly hands me a large paper bag.

“Here you go!”

“Huh? Wh-what's this?”

When I look inside, it's filled with tons of clothes.

"I'd pay you if I could, but the agencies get really touchy when it comes to using amateurs. So take these clothes as your payment! Rest easy, honey, they're all in your size. I made sure to pick the ones that'll fit you best!"

"Whaaa—?! I—I can't take all this! It was a good experience for me, and..."

"Shush. You're going to take them! When you do work, you get rewarded for your time and effort. That's how society works, mm-hmm?"

"A-ahhh, okay... In that case...um...thank you very much."

Hikaru's only response is a smile and a nod. He's such a nice guy.

As I'm thinking that about Hikaru, Miu calls over to me.

"Yuuya, thank you for your help today."

"No, thank you! It was a really valuable experience for me, and more than anything else...I think seeing professionals up close, working hard on perfecting their craft, is just really inspiring!"

When I return Miu's words of gratitude with a smile, she looks momentarily surprised but immediately breaking into a wide grin.

"I'm glad to hear that! I hope we have another opportunity to work together again!"

"Yes! And I'll be rooting for you, Miu!"

Just as I was about to set off from the shoot in this peaceful atmosphere...

"Yo. Sorry I'm late!"

A cool-looking guy walks over to us.

His blond hair is set with hair wax, and there's some fashionable piercings in his ear.

He's well-dressed and he's got a similar aura to Miu.

At the same time, there's something that's completely different about him, but I can't figure out what that is.

I stare blankly since I don't know who this person is, but Hikaru goes from smiling to angry in a flash, a vein popping out on his forehead.

"You goddamned brat...!"

He's suddenly talking all masculine now!

That totally caught me by surprise, but just who is this guy?

"Um...Miu, who is this gentleman?"

"Oh... He's the male model who was scheduled to shoot with me today."

It all clicks the moment Miu explains.

The reason he seemed so similar is because he's also a model.

As I'm processing that in my own head, the man notices Miu and smirks as he approaches.

"Miuuuuu! We're shooting together today. You excited?"

“Oh, I...”

“Well, let’s get this shoot over with and go find something nice to eat.”

The man wraps his arm around Miu’s shoulders, which seems to bother her. She seems unsure how to respond.

This is...

“Come ooooo. You can go, right?”

“Um, excuse me...”

“Eh?”

When I speak up, the man glances over at me with a look of exasperation.

“The hell are you? Don’t talk to me. No one wants you here. Get lost.”

Despite the fact that all I did was try to talk to him, he suddenly insults me. Why?

I’m caught off guard for a moment, but I quickly pull myself together and firmly say my piece.

“No, well...Miu seems troubled by you getting so close to her, so maybe you should give her a little space?”

“Y-Yuuya!”

“...Say what now?”

Miu calls out my name in a faint panic while the man glares at me.

He takes his arm off Miu’s shoulders and struts over to where I’m standing.

“Who do you think you’re talking to?”

“Huh?”

...Uh, well, I don’t recognize this guy or anything... Is he supposed to be famous?

Seems he doesn’t like my attitude, and he glares more intently at me.

“Words not getting through, eh...?”

“Uhhh... Oh.”

Just as I start feeling like things are getting a little tense, the man suddenly takes a swing at me.

“That attitude of yours pisses me off...!”

“Y-Yuuya?!”

I’m surprised by the fact that he’s suddenly taking a swing at me, but he’s way slower than the Goblin Elite or the Goblin General.

And, well, I don’t enjoy getting randomly punched, so my body reacts by reflex.

I grab the fist heading for my face, twist the man’s arm behind his back, and pin him to the ground.

“Guh!”

“W-wow...”

I just got attacked out of nowhere, and my body reacted automatically... Is that okay? This won't end up being my fault, right? If it turns out he's innocent and I'm guilty because he's good-looking, I'm totally going to cry! If that happens, I'm running away to the other world!

As I'm thinking these silly things, the man starts grumbling.

"I—I used to box! How did you do that so easily...?!"

How am I supposed to know?

It's not like I can tell the guy was a boxer based on his punch. Everyone's punches basically look the same to me. They all might as well be in slow motion compared to the Goblin General.

Of course, when you're on the Goblin General's level, even a random swing carries enormous power, so it's not the sort of strength an ordinary person can obtain just by training a little. Which is why I need to raise my stats while refining my techniques to be able to challenge monsters that boast far greater physical strength.

Which reminds me, is the reason Miu looked panicked because she knows this guy was a boxer? Given that he emphasized that point, I gather this man usually solves all his problems with brute force. The truth is, before I leveled up, he would've taken me down easy, and I wouldn't have been able to do anything about it. Even if I saw his punch coming when I was still weak, I probably wouldn't have understood what was happening. Whatever the attack, it probably would've knocked me down.

I'm a little depressed about all of that, when Hikaru kneels down in front of the pinned man and says with a bright smile, "Resorting to violence? Consider your celebrity career over. Career aside, what you did is a crime, you know? What a pity, darling..."

"Wha—?! Y-you got no evidence! Look, I'm the one pinned on the ground!"

Well, I think the people milling around saw everything from start to finish, but...won't they just side with the handsome guy? Should I get ready to cry?

However, it turns out there's no need.

Hikaru grins impishly and shows his camera to the man.

"Oh, honey, I caught the entire thing on video."

"D-damn it all!"

The man desperately thrashes about, but when he notices that my body isn't budging at all, he finally gives up and gets carted off by the photography staff in the end.

"Sheesh... I didn't think I'd have to deal with that irritation at the end! But wow, Yuuya... You're a beast, aren't you? Apparently, he had a decent run as a boxer..."

"I-it was just a fluke! Ha-ha-ha-ha..."

I can't say it. There's no way I can say I've been training in another world.

Anyway, I call over to Miu.

"Are you all right?"

"Huh? Oh...um...thank you so much!"

Miu looks surprised when I talk to her, but she quickly turns to me, her cheeks faintly flushed as she bows her head deeply.

"Please...don't worry about it! I wasn't even sure if I should say anything!"

"No... Lately, he's been following me almost obsessively, so what you did was really helpful!"

Whoa, that's creepy.

So he was basically stalking her? Oof.

"The whole situation feels a little awkward now, but I want to take the time again...to thank you for today, Yuuya. I hope we can meet again someday."

"Yes! Let's meet again!"

"Yuuya, thanks for everything!" Hikaru calls out as I depart.

I begin reflecting on what happened today.

I honestly wasn't sure how I should respond to that sudden request to model for a photo shoot, but it ended up being a pretty good experience, so I'm glad it happened.

And for the clothes...I was able to get a fashion professional to pick out some out for me, so I managed to do what I set out to do as well.

But man...I don't know what's going to happen to that aggressive dude, but the whole entertainment world can be surprisingly scary.

I can't help but feel that way based on today's experiences.

"I wonder, who in the world is he...?" After Yuuya left the mall, Hikaru let that vague question slip out with a sigh of admiration. "To be that well-built and have such great looks... I've been in this world a long time, but I've never seen anyone quite like him. And he's an amateur to boot..."

"Yeah, he was really impressive! I mean, I'm straight and I still couldn't keep my eyes off him."

"Still, it was obvious this was his first time modeling, and he was pretty awkward at times."

"What's most impressive is how that awkwardness still looks good when he does it!"

As though drawn to speak by Hikaru's words, the staff members who participated in the photo shoot eagerly began discussing Yuuya.

Hikaru let out a wry chuckle at his staff's reactions, then turned to Miu as she prepared to leave.

"Oh right, Miu, do you want to take a look at the photos before you

go?”

“Ah! Can I?”

“Of course! Here, take a good look, darling.”

Hikaru had already transferred all of the photos to his laptop, and Miu started flipping through them.

“...When you look at these shots, Yuuya really is impressive. I mean, he's not a professional model, so I understand why his expressions are a little stiff, but something about him pulls you in so much that you just stop caring about that...”

“You think so, too? This was a shoot for a fashion magazine, so in theory, the clothes are supposed to be front and center... But your eye just ends up focusing on him.”

The spotlight was supposed to be on the clothing first and foremost, not on the models. However, they had hired a famous model like Miu to maximize the brand image of the clothing, and Miu had filled that role to perfection.

But in Yuuya's case, even though the clothing was supposed to be the focus, he simply stood out in a way that made it impossible to not see him as the centerpiece.

“And the thing is, if it was just that Yuuya was standing out, I would have retaken the pictures, but... It's almost like the clothing looks better in an effort to bring out the best in him. What are you supposed to do about that?”

Yes, the reason they hadn't reshot the photos was because the clothes were still showcasing their charms as well, so the photos ended up accomplishing their goal even if Yuuya had been unexpectedly prominent.

Miu chuckled at Hikaru's struggle.

Then a particular photo caught her eye.

“Huh? Is this picture...?”

“Oh, you noticed, too, Miu?”

The picture that caught Miu's attention was the photo of Yuuya and Miu smiling as they chatted during the break.

It looked like a scene out of an ordinary day, and it was an extremely natural photo that perfectly encapsulated the theme of two lovers that Hikaru had built the photo shoot around.

Miu's natural smile in the photo was extremely attractive, while Yuuya was overflowing with such charm that the viewer almost felt drawn into the photo.

“I want to use this as the main shot for this set. Isn't it really good?”

“Y-yes... This Yuuya is very...um...attractive...”

Miu had felt somewhat drawn to Yuuya and his good looks when she first saw him, but when she laid eyes on the Yuuya in this photo, she found her cheeks growing warmer.

“...Oh? Oh my, oh my. Miu, your face is all red.”

“Eh? I-it is not!”

Noticing the change in Miu’s demeanor, Hikaru smirked as he teased her.

“I suppose I’ll take your word for it this time.”

“E-erm... Is my face that red?”

“Like an apple, darling. But that’s a good look for you, Miu.”

“I-is it?”

Miu tilted her head quizzically as Hikaru looked at her warmly.

“Hee-hee... And the Miu in that photo also has a charm that’s different from your usual self, darling. I’m sure you’ll have many more shoots in the future, but don’t ever forget how you felt then, hmm?”

“Oh...right!”

The photo shoot that had been such a valuable experience for Yuuya also ended up being a valuable experience for everyone else involved.

One day has passed since I did some impromptu modeling work.

I’m regretting the fact that I didn’t buy anything besides necessities... You know, normal stuff like appliances.

The TV in this house doesn’t get any reception.

It’s an old analog TV, and it can’t receive the new digital signals.

Since I don’t subscribe to any newspapers, I can’t keep up with the news without a TV.

There’s also a couple other appliances that are so old, even I can tell they’re on their last legs.

“Well, that was a mistake... And I have school starting today...”

Unfortunately, today is the start of a new school week.

“I need money for my daily life, which means I need to go the other world... *Sigh*... It’d be so much easier if I could just skip school and go hunt monsters...”

The fact that I’m complaining but still going to school probably means I’m just that much of a wimp. My heart sinks as I feel the start of a new school week looming, but I manage to leave the house and make my way to school. Then I hear a voice calling me.

“Hey, you.”

“Huh?”

When I turn around, I see my younger brother, Youta Tenjou, and my younger sister, Sora Tenjou, glaring at me.

...Oh great. What a way to start the week. Running into people I’d like to avoid meeting if at all possible.

I knew I would run into them eventually, but their timing couldn’t have been better. Today of all days...

Even as I dread dealing with them, I decide to make an effort and ask, “Um... What do you...want...?”

“What do we want? You totally forgot your place and messed with us, you spineless excuse for an older brother.”

“.....”

I can't figure out for the life of me what they're talking about.

My confusion shows on my face, and Sora berates me.

“Lately, my friends can't stop talking about you. How our shitty big brother's suddenly become super hot. We let it go because we figured it was just a dumb rumor, but we came to see for ourselves when it refused to die down.”

“Excuse me...?”

Rumors? Me? People are gossiping about me?

“And this is what we find... You stupid pig... What the hell did you do?!”

“What do you mean...?”

“Don't play dumb! Look at you! You're like a different person!”

Ah... Well, yeah.

It's true, I do look really different. I'm a lot thinner now, and my face has gone through some extreme changes.

But it's not like I can explain to them that I changed by leveling up in another world... Besides, even if I thought they might believe me, these are the last people I want to tell.

These two spent a lot of time mocking not just me, but Gramps as well.

No way in hell am I going to tell these two about my...about Gramps's treasure.

As I'm thinking that through, it seems they've regained some of their calm, and they start talking down to me like always.

“Hmph. Let me guess: You got plastic surgery, right? Getting all that work done on your face... It doesn't change the fact that it's all fake. So where'd you get the money? Maybe you sold that house? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“...”

It's not plastic surgery.

And something inside me is instinctively telling me that I'm different on a genetic level.

...Youta's making fun of plastic surgery as “fake,” but that choice is just the result of people refusing to give up on pursuing their idea of beauty and putting in extra effort to look the way they want to.

Youta's denying the value of that effort, mocking it.

Are there a lot of people who think like him? If there are...that's sad.

I think many people who seek out those procedures really do want to better themselves, to bring their bodies in line with who they want to be.

As a side note, since we're having this little row in public, a lot of people passing by are regarding us with open curiosity. It's honestly embarrassing...

"Whatever. Either way, you're still inferior to us in every way, piggy."

"Yeah. You're dumb, and your future's probably bleaker than bleak."

"You're no good at studying, you're no good at sports... You're just an inferior being!"

"....."

They're pulling out all the stops today, but since it's all true, I have nothing to say in response.

Suddenly, the crowd of students around us stirs.

"Huh? What's happening?"

Youta and Sora also notice the buzzing voices and tilt their heads quizzically, when a limousine suddenly stops near us.

"Wha—?!"

"Huh?"

Both the twins and I are struck dumb by the sudden appearance of a stretch limo. When the doors open, two women emerge from within.

First is a really beautiful woman dressed in a butler's uniform, while the other—

"Yuuya Tenjou... Correct?"

"Huh?"

I'm sure I've heard that voice before.



She's dressed in a white blazer-style uniform and has long silken black hair that stretches to her hip.

Exuding the delicate essence of a traditional Japanese beauty, she clearly possesses the sort of overwhelming aura that marks her apart from the rest of us normal people.

And I...can't take my eyes off of her.

She's an extremely beautiful girl, boasting a different kind of beauty from Miu the model.

Her features are refined, but more than anything, the frank, clear-eyed gaze she directs straight at me and her soft, gentle demeanor are working in concert to grab my attention and hold it.

...I wonder where that uniform is from?

I stare blankly for a moment, when Youta shouts, his voice cracking.

"A-a uniform from Ousei Academy?!"

"Huh?"

Ousei Academy.

It's a famous high school that even I've heard of, and its graduates can automatically matriculate into Ousei University.

It goes without saying that the school is teeming with high-performing students and some of them even hold the highest marks in their respective focuses, while the school's alumni fill the top ranks in multiple industries. It's a school for people who live in a completely different world—a world of elites who already have one foot in the corridors of power.

This is the sort of school where if you can get admitted, your future is pretty much assured, which is why so many people dream of attending and make it their goal to get in.

...Though of course, that's exactly why it's incredibly hard to get accepted.

Why is a student from that school here...?

It seems my thoughts show on my face, and the girl in front of me smiles gracefully.

"Hee-hee. Do you not remember? When I was being accosted by men by the convenience store..."

"Huh? Oh... Ohhhhh!"

I remember now.

Yes, it's true, I helped a girl who was being harassed by a bunch of men... Or rather, they beat me up and left her alone.

At the time, I had no experience talking with girls, so I couldn't even look her in the eye.

"Have I jogged your memory?"

"Y-yes. Um...how do you know my name?"

"Ah, my apologies. I went ahead and had my people look into your life so I could properly thank you, Yuuya."

“Whaaat?!”

Look into...what, exactly? It's not like there's that much information to find out about me.

I'm really curious about what exactly she learned, but as I'm thinking that, she quizzically tilts her head.

“Hmm, oh... Yuuya, did you lose weight?”

“Huh? Ah, yes I did.”

I'm pretty sure I've changed in quite a few other ways, but based on her reaction alone, I'm starting to think maybe all I did was lose some weight. No, maybe that's what actually happened.

As my head devolves into a jumbled mess, the lady in the butler's uniform interjects.

“Mistress, perhaps that's enough of an introduction. Best to get to the topic at hand...”

“Oh, that's right!” The girl says as though she just remembered what she came here for, and she turns to me with a smile and drops an enormous bombshell.

“Yuuya—will you come to Ousei Academy?”

For a moment, I don't understand what she just said.

It came so suddenly that I can't do anything besides gape and stare.

“Forgive the late introduction, but my name is Kaori Houjou. I am a member of Ousei Academy's student council.”

I watch as she politely bows with incredible poise. Meanwhile, I'm still staring in bewilderment at this girl—at Houjou.

When I finally come to my senses, I force myself to utter the words:

“Uhhh... Me, go to Ousei Academy...? What do you mean...?”

It's the lady in the butler's uniform who answers my question rather than Houjou.

“Master Tenjou, when Mistress Kaori's father—the principal of Ousei Academy—heard that you protected Kaori, he insisted that we welcome you to our institution.”

“Oh, but...all I did was...”

I can't claim to have actually protected her.

It's embarrassing, but all I did was lie there and get beat up.

However, it seems Houjou realizes what I'm feeling and clears it up for me with a gentle expression.

“Yuuya, you stepped in when everyone else pretended not to see anything. That's not something anyone can do. You did, in fact, protect me.”

“Oh...”

As I slowly digest her words of genuine appreciation, I feel a warmth in my heart but also a little shyness.

Houjou then asks again.

“Now, how about it?”

“...I’m very grateful for the offer, but I’m not particularly good at anything. I don’t have the academic ability to transfer into Ousei Academy...”

“Ah, as for that—”

“Excuse me!”

Just as Houjou is about to say something, Youta breaks his silence to interrupt her.

Despite the fact that Youta just rudely cut in, she turns to him with her gentle expression perfectly intact.

“Yes?”

“Could we be admitted instead?”

“Huh?”

Youta says this with a confident expression.

“We’re far better than the pig standing there. It’d make much more sense to let us in!”

“Yes! We’ve maintained top-tier grades at our current school, and we can guarantee results in sports, too! We go around helping out the various teams at our school, after all!”

Sora adds her voice to Youta’s initial pitch.

“So next year, please let us...”

“I’m afraid not.”

“...Huh?”

As Youta confidently tries to appeal, it’s Houjou’s turn to cut him off and firmly shoot down his proposal.

“Um, uh, what did...you just say...?”

“Allow me to be explicit—we do not want either of you at our academy.”

The twins evidently didn’t think they’d be rejected outright and stare blankly in shock.

To be honest, I didn’t expect that, either.

The truth is, Youta and Sora really are more talented than I am.

I mean, despite my daily studying, it’s not like I have especially good grades, and sports are completely beyond me.

Youta and Sora refuse to accept their rejection and questioningly look at Houjou.

“Wh-why? We’re so much better than that pig over there—”

“Completely out of the question.”

“Huh...?”

Houjou’s gentle smile vanishes behind a firm expression, and she bluntly addresses the twins, saying “Yuuya is someone I owe a great debt to. Do you think I would want to allow people who insult and demean that person into our academy?”

“Th-that...”

“Besides, we’ve already reviewed your daily behavior.”

“What?!” ”

Youta and Sora let out a cry of surprise at her statement.

Houjou then glances to the lady in the butler’s suit, who calmly begins explaining.

“In inviting Tenjou to Ousei Academy, we investigated Tenjou and his surroundings. That includes his various relationships, of course... As a result, we found that not only were you subjecting Tenjou to terrible bullying, but you were also doing the same to other students. Of course, we’re aware that it isn’t just you two... Other students—and even teachers—were actively participating or complicit in the bullying.”

“Wha...?”

The twins are lost for words. Then again, I am, too.

Wait, so while looking into my background, they even checked all my relationships at school?!

As I’m struggling to process that revelation, Sora immediately shoots back with “D-do you have any evidence?”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Obviously it’s so that we can prove our innocence by—”

“I see. Then let me be blunt. We have evidence. Regardless, whether we have any is irrelevant.”

“Irrelevant...?!”

“Of course. We simply wish to invite Tenjou to attend Ousei Academy. Further, the information we’ve gathered is enough to let us conclude that we will not admit you to the academy. Oh, rest assured. We will not be disclosing the information to the media. However...it may impact your academic recommendations.”

With those final words from the butler, the twins fall completely silent, unable to respond.

When Houjou once again looks over at the butler, she takes an elegant bow and returns to her original spot behind Houjou.

“As I was about to say before I was interrupted, entering or transferring into our academy isn’t particularly difficult.”

“Huh?!”

“It’s relatively easy to transfer into Ousei Academy so long as the student in question is a good person in their daily life. They need not be perfectly cultured or mannered. Academic performance can be improved with proper study. The focus of the academy is on character rather than test results. *That* is why it’s simply not possible for you two to attend our academy.”

With that decisive pronouncement, the twins lose all hope.

While the school I attend is a combined six-year middle and high school, there’s plenty of students who leave to attend different high

schools.

Those people generally choose schools that are more prestigious than their current school.

And based on how the twins are reacting, it seems they were aiming for a different high school, and I suspect they were already trying to get into Ousei Academy.

Well, that makes sense. Given that there's a top-level school like that in this area, it's natural for the twins to try to get in. They're good enough students to consider it, at least.

But a student from the school they hoped to attend...the daughter of the principal to boot...just told them flat out that they should give up. Their reaction is totally understandable.

As Houjou turns to me, I can't help but notice her demeanor is gentle and caring again.

"My apologies. We got off topic... However, as I just explained, there's no issue with you transferring into Ousei Academy, Yuuya."

"I—I see..."

Apparently, Ousei Academy has an unusual admissions policy...

Ordinarily, academic ability and athletic ability are big factors in admissions, but to say so bluntly that they don't matter...

I can't help but tense up a bit at that revelation. Houjou simply smiles and speaks up again.

"For now, could you accompany us to our campus? There you can speak to my father...the principal. It's perfectly fine if you hold off on a decision until then."

With that, Houjou gestures to the limo.

The butler, evidently anticipating Houjou's words, already has the door open and waiting.

"Oh, Yuuya. While I mentioned that we won't publish the information about those two, the teachers involved have already been terminated, so please rest assured that everything has been properly taken care of."

"What?!"

Rest assured?! If anything, I'm *more* frightened by the sheer information-gathering ability and how fast you guys move!

But it's true that the teachers picked on me! Corporal punishment was par for the course, and a lot of them made comments that egged on my classmates!

As I'm rendered speechless once again, Houjou smiles and bows at the twins standing there in a stupor.

"I bid you a pleasant day."

And with that, I'm off to Ousei Academy.

Once Yuuya, Kaori, and her butler departed, the area was abuzz with

chatter.

“Wow, those people were impressive!”

“Yeah, definitely what you’d expect from the great Ousei Academy... They just had a different air about them.”

“Never mind that. The girl and the butler were both beautiful.”

“And that boy they were talking to was super handsome... Just looking at them was a feast for the eyes.”

“Oh, hey, those two... I don’t know why, but they were totally rejected from Ousei Academy, huh?”

“Yeah, right? Oh well, too bad for them.”

As the students around them offered their unwanted opinions, the twins turned beet red with anger.

“I-I’ll never forgive that bastard... Making us look like idiots...”

“Yes, there’s absolutely no way we’re taking this lying down...”

Youta glared daggers in the direction that limo had driven off.

“I’m going to make them all regret it...”

His ominous murmur was lost in the buzzing chatter of the students around him.

CHAPTER 5

Ousei Academy

“__”

My brain is still struggling to keep pace with all the developments, and before I realize it, I'm at the entrance to Ousei Academy.

It's an extremely fancy gate that looks like it belongs in front of a European castle, not a high school in Japan.

Not only that, but beyond the gates, I catch a glimpse of a school building that looks like a literal palace, plus enormous sports fields.

Um, this is, well...

The campus is massive.

“Welcome to Ousei Academy!”

Houjou declares this with a smile as I gawk at the sheer size of the school.

I follow behind Houjou in a dreamlike daze and pass through the gates.

Evidently, homeroom's already started, seeing as how there's no other students walking down the halls.

“U-um... Are you sure this is okay?”

“What do you mean?”

“Uh... I don't see any students around, so isn't it already time for morning homeroom...?”

Given my lack of bravery, I'm too frightened of consequences in general to do things like be late for school, which is why I'm worried if Houjou will be okay showing me around instead of going to class.

Houjou smiles elegantly.

“Hee-hee. It's fine. As I mentioned earlier, my father is the principal of this academy. Besides, I've already told the faculty I'll be late today.”

“I see...”

Seems like there's nothing to worry about. Thank goodness.

I'd feel really bad if she ended up getting in trouble on my account.

Anyway, the principal of a school this big... I mean, I can tell from Houjou's demeanor that she's been raised to observe strict etiquette, but I assume that's because she comes from a good family. She's got this...dignified bearing.

Whereas I'm pretty sure I've got the aura of someone who's broke.

Oh, that reminds me... I need to stop by the supermarket on the way home. Eggs are on sale today.

I ponder mundane concerns as I trail Houjou until we eventually arrive at a door marked as the principal's office.

Houjou knocks, and I hear a dignified baritone respond from inside.

"Come in."

"Pardon me."

"P-pardon me!"

I follow suit, and my entire body tenses when I enter the room on Houjou's heels.

The furniture inside the office is all clearly high quality, like the fine leather sofa or the tastefully simple brown coffee table. Farther in, I spot a large work desk with a debonair middle-aged man sitting behind it.

The man briefly looks surprised when he sees me enter, but his eyes immediately crinkle into a warm and welcoming expression as he waves us in.

"Thank you for coming. My name is Tsukasa Houjou, the principal of this academy. Yuuya Tenjou... My daughter Kaori has told me all about you. Thank you for aiding my daughter in her time of need."

After a polite introduction, he lowers his head in appreciation, and I nervously stammer, "P-please raise your head! I didn't do anything special..."

"No, whatever you may think, you acted when no one else would. That's something you should be proud of."

"That's right, Yuuya. Once again, thank you."

I can't help but feel crushed by modesty when they go out of their way to spell it out.

"I—I understand..."

"...Thank you."

At last, both of them raise their heads.

Then I realize something and decide to ask about it.

"That reminds me. Why was, uh, Miss Houjou alone that night? Doesn't she have a bodyguard or something like that...?"

"Yuuya, please don't address me so formally. Please call me Kaori. No need for any titles or the like."

"Huh?! But..."

"My daughter insists. Besides, you're the same age. Dispose with the formalities."

“I-in that case...”

I think that I’m still violating some sort of law of nature by doing so as I answer, when Houjou...when Kaori smiles.

“Now, as for your question, I want Kaori to have as normal a life as possible, so she hasn’t had a bodyguard since she was a little child.”

“That’s also how I wanted it. Since I’ll eventually be independent and take a job of my own, there’s no need for a bodyguard, is there? But unfortunately, after that incident, I now have someone who escorts me to and from school.”

“It’s not something I enjoy requiring, but she is my daughter. I think you can understand why I’d be protective.”

“I see...”

I guess the rich have their own problems.

I mean, there’s no way someone would kidnap a pauper like me and hold me hostage, but that risk feels much more real when your family is wealthy.

Kidnapping is probably an extreme case. That night, Kaori was just getting hit on by some random men. But I’m told there’s gangs of delinquents that frequent the neighborhood, like the crew Araki hangs with, so it’s not like this area is 100 percent safe, either.

After that brief exchange, we finally get to the subject at hand.

“Now, are you aware of why you’ve been invited here today, Yuuya?”

“Y-yes. To find out whether or not I’ll be transferring into Ousei Academy...” I answer, and the principal nods.

“That’s right. Personally, I would like you to start attending Ousei Academy, but...I’d like to hear your thoughts. I should mention up front that this is partly in thanks for helping my daughter, so there’s no need to worry about things like tuition.”

“Oh no! There’s no need to go that far...”

“As I said before, she’s my precious daughter. It’s the least I could do for someone who saved her.”

The principal smiles as he says this, and Kaori blushes a bit in embarrassment.

...I’m glad they get along.

It’s...completely different from my family.

“So...how about it?”

“I... Should somebody like me really attend a school that’s supposed to be for the best and brightest...?”

Ousei Academy is a school that’s so famous in Japan that pretty much everyone’s heard about it.

A significant number of the people who make a name for themselves in Japan and abroad are alumni of this school.

In other words, they’re the chosen few... It’s a school that only the

most talented people are allowed to attend.

For someone like me who has no notable talents to speak of, it's...

I cast my eyes to the floor after I tentatively posed the obvious question. The principal responds gently.

"Yuuya, what sort of person do you think is described as a genius?"

"Huh? ...My gut response would be someone who can do anything?"

"Certainly, that's one definition. But I am of the belief that a genius is someone who can find the right answer or the proper way to put in the effort required to learn something faster than normal people when they engage in an activity. To put it a different way, that's all that sets them apart from everyone else. Hard work and effort will always bring you closer to the truth."

"....."

"Of course, everyone has their own talents and strengths. But that's not something you can determine at your age. Young people like you should experience a great many things and enjoy the process... It's not too late to find your calling after that. And that's exactly why we started this academy. Which is why you have no need to put yourself down. You can take your time to learn more about yourself and discover who you really are."

I feel the principal's words sink into me.

The only other person who's ever said anything like that to me was Gramps.

No matter what I tried, I was always compared to the twins or others, continually reminded that I'm talentless and worthless. And after Gramps died, I had no choice but to accept that as the truth.

For the first time in a long time, someone is telling me otherwise...

As various emotions swirl in my chest and I'm unable to respond, the principal offers a proposal.

"I'm sure it's quite an overwhelming thing to consider. Why not attend the academy today as a trial?"

"Huh?"

I let out a surprised squeak, but the principal doesn't seem to mind and smiles as he continues.

"You can experience life at our academy for a day, and if that persuades you to attend, then we'll happily welcome you into the fold."

As I stare in stunned silence at the generous proposal, I hear a knock on the door.

"Seems she's here... Come in."

"Good mornin'."

With that, a woman enters the room.

Dressed in a white lab coat, she seems to regard her surroundings with a vague languidness, and the shirt underneath her lab coat is

badly wrinkled.

What's more, her shirt is hanging off one of her shoulders so her breasts... Wait, is she even wearing a bra?! I don't see any straps or anything! I mean, not that I'd be calmer if I could see her bra!

I can't contain my bewilderment at the sight of this strangely lethargic lady, when the principal lets out a low chuckle.

"You never change, do you...? Yuuya, I'd like you to take classes under her for the day."

"You heard the man. Don't worry, you can relax. I'll make sure you learn."

"Ummm..."

Is this going to be all right?

I can't really put my concern into words, but the principal comments with a faint air of exasperation.

"...I know you probably have many questions, but despite her appearance, she's a renowned chemist. Her classes are easy to understand, and the students love her. So rest assured, you're in good hands."

"That's right. By all accounts, I'm pretty impressive."

"...Yes, you're in good hands..."

Nope, still worried!

I feel all sorts of anxiety as I watch the exchange between the principal and the woman, but it turns out I'm going to end up having a trial day at Ousei Academy.

"All righty, take your seats, everyone. We just finished homeroom earlier, but there's one more thing on the docket."

At the teacher's words, one of the students asked, "Question, question! What's going on?"

"That's what I'm about to talk about, duh."

"Oh, that's right. Please continue!"

"You change gears quick, don't you?"

At the teacher's words, the classroom was filled with trills of laughter.

Then the teacher's lips quirked in a mysterious smile.

"Listen up! This class'll be taking on a trial student for the day."

"I"

With that, the murmurs started in the classroom.

Transfer students were rare no matter the school.

At this point, the student who asked the first question spoke up again.

"Oh, oh, oh! Is it a boy or a girl?"

"It's a boy."

The teacher's answer divided the response among the students in

half.

Most of the boys in the class were clearly disappointed, while a lot of the girls perked up with open interest and began discussing what the new student would be like.

But the boys clearly weren't completely disinterested, as they immediately joined in on the speculation.

"It's fine to get all worked up, but we don't have much time. The rest of the day is regular classes. Now, let's see the man of the hour."

After that statement, the teacher smirked as she looked over her class.

"Don't be too surprised!"

"?"

The students tilted their heads quizzically, confused at their teacher's statement, when Yuuya finally entered the room.

I, Yuuya Tenjou, after deciding to accept the principal's offer of spending a day at Ousei Academy, am escorted to the classroom by my temporary teacher.

Since Kaori's in a different class, we split up along the way.

...I'm super nervous.

But seeing this teacher has helped my nerves a little bit.

Given this school's reputation as a superelite academy, I was expecting all the teachers to be super strict, but this teacher's absurdly laid-back.

The principal did say that she's really good at her job and the students love her, so I guess that balances it out?

I'm not sure I'd last long under someone who's too harsh, so this is probably for the best.

At any rate, I should just appreciate the fact that she's the teacher who'll be looking after me today.

Now, the first thing to do in the classroom is to introduce myself, right?

I don't have any real hobbies, since I've always been busy with my part-time jobs... Uh-oh. This might be a pretty big problem when it comes to introducing myself.

O-oh, crap... What do I do...?

Just as I was starting to relax, I start getting tense all over again, and my whole body goes stiff as a board.

"Hey, come on in."

As I'm desperately trying to figure out what I should do, the teacher calls me into the classroom.

...Hey, future me...help! Heeelp!

Weird thoughts race through my mind, simultaneously passing the buck while also putting responsibility squarely on my shoulders. After

a moment, I manage to steel myself and enter the classroom.

“Ah?!”

Uh?

The first things I feel when I enter the room are the eyes of the entire class focusing on me.

Well, nothing odd about that, since I'm a temporary student about to introduce myself.

But the huge murmur of surprise that shot through the class the moment I appeared doesn't make any sense.

I find everyone's wide-eyed stares to be rather odd as I stand in front of the blackboard.

“All righty. Let's have a light introduction.”

“O-okay. I'm Yuuya Tenjou. I'll be participating today on a trial-basis. I'm looking forward to getting to know you all.”

With that, I lower my head before raising it again, but everyone's still staring, and not a single one of my temporary classmates reacts in any shape or form. Um, can I cry now?

As I'm about to break into tears at the deafening silence, the teacher, who's chuckling for some reason, offers me a lifeline.

“*Snicker...* Hey, stop staring. You're making things weird for Tenjou... Okay, Tenjou. Sit at the very back by the window.”

“Y-yes, ma'am.”

I head over to my seat and offer a greeting to the student next to me.

“Um... Pleasure to meet you.”

“Huh? Oh...yep... Pleasure.”

The student next to me is a girl with a short bob and a faintly cool demeanor.

She's wearing a choker on her throat, so...I assume that sort of accessory isn't prohibited?

Either way, that's the sort of thing I only see among delinquents at my school. Jewelry and accessories are against the rules, and so is bleaching your hair.

But lots of the kids in the class have bleached or dyed hair, and a lot of them come to school wearing fashionable accessories.

In the middle of my observation, the teacher claps her hands together.

“Hey, kids, come back to Earth. It's time for class,” she says, but it takes another minute for everyone to come to their senses.

After that, I attend class like any other student.

I was worried that the class might be taught at a speed I wouldn't be able to follow, but turns out that isn't the case, and the classes don't feel all that different from my school.

But the content of the lessons is another matter entirely.

While it's supposed to be the same content as what's taught at my school, it's much, much easier to understand.

I always found class pretty dull, but I'm actually enjoying learning.

The teachers use examples from manga or games to make concepts easier to understand and much more accessible.

The most remarkable thing is the relationship between the teachers and the students.

The balance at this school is pretty much perfect.

Although there's a friendly rapport, there's still a clear line between teacher and student, and I'm amazed at how the teachers and students manage to maintain the right distance.

The morning classes end as I'm processing this new information, and now it's the lunch break.

"Oh, Hyoudou. Thanks for showing me your textbook."

"...Mm. Don't worry about it."

Though I'm taking the classes, I don't have any of the textbooks, so I had to ask the calm, cool girl next to me—Yukine Hyoudou—to show me her textbooks.

Hyoudou's hair has a faint blue mesh pattern in it and is cropped into a short bob. Her eyes taper to sharp ends, and her gaze makes her seem perpetually a little sleepy.

With her fashionably loose uniform and her choker, she looks like she's in a band.

Although at a glance, she looks like she might be hard to approach, when I finally worked up the courage to talk to her, I realized right away that she's actually really nice.

As I'm thanking Hyoudou, the other students come over to talk to me.

"Hey, hey, hey! I have something I want to ask you!"

"What school do you go to?"

"Do you take any lessons?"

"Oh, what do you plan to do for your club activity?"

"Hey, hey! Do you have a girlfriend?"

"Are you an actor or model, maybe?"

"Um, uh..."

I've never experienced anything like the genuine curiosity currently coming my way, and I don't know how to respond.

...Maybe people really want to know more about the new student. You guys know I might only be here for just the day, right?

I don't dislike it, but I truly don't know what to do. That's when one of the boys steps in to calm everyone down.

"C'mon, guys, don't crowd Tenjou! He hasn't even had lunch yet. Let's all just rein it in a bit."

The guy in question has short hair bleached into a light brown and a handsome face that seems perpetually lit by a friendly smile. He's way better-looking than the model I ran into at the photo shoot or my younger brother.

Although he has bleached hair, he doesn't come off like a delinquent or bad boy. If anything, the impression I get of him is that he's a bright, friendly athlete.

At his call for some calm, everyone else stops and quickly apologizes.

"Sorry!"

"My bad. Totally slipped my mind."

"Let's chat after school, then!"

"Oh, sure."

After everyone finishes apologizing, they move on to their lunches.

As I watch them go, the guy who stopped the avalanche of questions calls me over.

"Sorry about that. Everyone here, me included, just wants to know more about you."

"Huh? Oh, no, thanks! Um..."

"I'm Ryou Igarashi. You can call me Ryou if I can call you Yuuya. Nice to meet ya."

The guy—Ryou—greet me with an easy grin.

Wow... He's got one heck of a dazzling smile...

I can't help but squint my eyes, and Ryou cocks his head quizzically at my weird reaction.

"Hmm? Something wrong?"

"Oh... It's just bright..."

"Huh? That's a weird thing to say."

Ryou's practically beaming at this point. I think I'm gonna be blind.

"Oh hey, you don't know where the cafeteria is, right? I can show you around if you want."

"Oh, really?"

"Of course. Why would I say no? Come on, let's go."

Dang, what a guy. I'm falling in love. Not actually, but still.

"Then I'll take you up on your offer..."

"Awesome! Oh, you mind if I bring along a friend?"

"Sure."

When I answer in the affirmative, Ryou calls over his friend.

"I-I'm Shingo Kurata. A-a-a pleasure to meet you, Y-Yuuya."

The friend who comes over is a boy with glasses who ever-so-slightly resembles a mouse.

...Hmm. I feel a strange kinship with him.

But I gotta say this an interesting combination... I figured Ryou's friend would be another athlete type, but if anything, Shingo is more

of the geeky, indoor type.

I can't help but wonder about their relationship, but that question is quickly put to rest.

"Hey, Shingo! Did you watch last night's episode of *Super Heavy Mecha Lord Godrobo?!?*"

"Y-you bet."

"Yeah?! It was awesome, wasn't it? Hey, got any other recommendations for anime or *tokusatsu* shows?"

"I-I'll let you know when I think of some...!"

Seems that Ryou gets anime recommendations from Shingo.

Wow... He's handsome and has geeky interests. That's awesome.

"Oh, you watch anime at all, Yuuya? I only started recently, but it's really fun!"

...Ryou's a good kid.

It didn't take long for me to understand that on an instinctual level.

"Here we are! The Ousei Academy cafeteria."

"..."

The cafeteria that Ryou shows me is fancier than any cafeteria I've ever seen.

There's a bunch of round tables with simple but tasteful chairs lined up as if we're looking at a trendy café's patio.

At each table, students are eating, chatting, and laughing.

...My school has a cafeteria, but it's a normal cafeteria and nothing this elegant.

I stare a bit blankly at the unbelievable scene in front of me, when Ryou laughs and calls to me.

"Ha-ha-ha! Yeah, I get it, man! But it doesn't just look fancy! Here, check this out."

"Huh?"

Next, Ryou shows me the menu.

And as I read the choices, my jaw once again drops in surprise.

There's an overwhelming number of dishes.

There's the typical big three of Japanese, Western, and Chinese food, along with choices from Spain and Russia... It's all food you'd usually have to find a special ethnic restaurant to eat.

Further, there's even menu items made with various religious and dietary restrictions in mind.

"Th-the dishes are apparently made by chefs who used to work at three-star restaurants."

"Three stars?!"

My eyes go wide at Shingo's words.

Wait, wait, wait, I don't have the money to order something that expensive! I mean, even if I can pay for it now, I can't keep eating like

that every day!

Seems Ryou can tell exactly what I'm thinking, and he flashes a knowing smile.

"Want another shocker? All the food here...is only five hundred yen!"

"——"

I really can't find anything to say.

Is this heaven?

I can have three-star restaurant dishes with just a single five-hundred-yen coin? I feel light-headed.

"Well, even at five hundred yen, it's still a bit much for some students who live on their own. That's why there's a daily lunch special for students like that."

"What's that?"

"It's a preset meal where the dishes change every day, so you can't pick what you'd like, but...it's free."

"....."

I'd already realized it during class, but this just made things clear.

Ousei Academy is on a whole other level.

I listen to Ryou's and Shingo's recommendations as I decide on my meal, and after we get our trays, we grab seats nearby.

Ryou's lunch is a tomato cream crab pasta, while Shingo has a tonkatsu platter.

Since everything's five hundred yen, I decide to pick the most expensive-looking thing on the menu and choose the wagyu chopped steak plate. What? I'm allowed to eat something a little fancy, right?

"All right, let's eat."

"Thanks for the food."

After showing our appreciation for the food, we focus on our respective plates.

I help myself to a bite of the chopped steak and stop dead, overwhelmed by the burst of flavor.

Wh-what is this?

The juices are practically overflowing! And it feels like the meat is melting in my mouth! T-this is impossibly delicious!

The chopped steak is so good that I don't have the words to describe it.

Ryou and Shingo chuckle as they watch me eat with zeal before turning back to their own dishes.

"H-hey... Look over there!"

"I wonder who that boy is...?"

"A transfer student?"

"He's hot..."

As I'm eating, I notice there's a bit of a stir building around us.

“What’s going on? It feels a little tense?”

“Mm? That’s because you’re here, Yuuya.”

“Me? Oh yeah, my uniform’s obviously different. Of course I’d stand out.”

“.....”

“Hmm? What is it?”

“...No, never mind.”

“???”

I thought Ryou looked at me with an expression that just screamed *You can’t be serious, right?* but I guess I imagined it.

As we continue chatting over lunch, Ryou suddenly asks a question as though the subject just occurred to him.

“Oh, say, do you do any club activities, Yuuya?”

“Huh?”

“Well, the school really loves encouraging club activities like athletics, so all the club teams are fairly strong.”

“Oh, I see...”

“That’s why I was wondering if you’re in any club at your current high school and if you’re thinking about joining the same club here.”

It goes without saying that I don’t participate in any clubs.

Money was so tight that I couldn’t afford to pay even the most modest of club fees, and no one was going to let me enjoy my life that way.

I answer Ryou with a weak laugh.

“Sorry to say that I’m not in any club.”

“Huh. Really? That’s a surprise.”

“What about you guys?”

“Me? I’m in the go home club.”

“Interesting. I figured you were in some sort of athletic club...”

It might be stereotyping on my part, but Ryou’s appearance really led me to believe that he’s a friendly, extroverted athlete, so it comes as a bit of a surprise to learn he’s not on any of the teams.

Shingo adds some context with a smile.

“R-Ryou is good at all kinds of sports, and he had invitations from most of the clubs when we first started. It was basically a tug-of-war between them all.”

“Seriously?! Then why?”

All I can think after hearing that is how some people really are like characters in a manga.

Ryou just answers matter-of-factly, “Mm... Guess it’s because I wanted to try various things...?”

“Various things?”

“Yep. I played soccer in middle school and was pretty good at it, but... Well, when I started going to school here, while I do like soccer,

I figured it'd be fun to try out some other sports, and in the end, I wound up in the go home club."

"B-but Ryou takes part in various club activities as a guest player or helper, and he always has great results whenever he does."

"Heh, stop, you're making me blush."

Ryou actually is blushing and laughing modestly.

He really is like someone straight out of a manga. Not in a bad way. He's a seriously good guy; I can see why he's popular.

"I see, I see... So that's one way to approach things..."

"Yeah. If you decide to come here, you can experience a lot of things even without joining a club. In that sense, Shingo's club is pretty different."

"Huh. What club are you in, Shingo?"

When I ask, Shingo answers with a smile.

"I-I'm in the gaming club."

"Gaming club?! As in...video games?!"

"Yup."

Holy crap. You're allowed to bring games to school here? I mean, I figured the school was more flexible than most when I saw students openly wearing accessories and dyeing their hair, but to be this lenient...

I'm struggling to process the absurd amount of freedom that Ousei Academy grants its students when Shingo explains the details.

"O-of course you can't play them during class, but you can play games or use your smartphone during breaks. A normal school would probably be inclined to ban that, but because Ousei Academy is so lenient, there's no one who actually plays with their phone or games during class. That's why the school allows a gaming club."

"Wow..."

I can only let out a sigh of admiration.

In other words, this academy trusts its students to do the right thing and allows them the freedom to bring smartphones and games in return.

But what's even more impressive is the fact that the students do their best not to betray that trust. It's mind-blowing that sort of relationship really exists.

Ryou and Shingo tell me even more surprising things as we chat, and I thoroughly enjoy my lunch.

Afterward, I have the opportunity to chat with other students, and they all look straight at me when we speak.

Up until now, no one has ever spared me so much as a glance, but everyone at this school sees me as a proper human being and treats me as an equal.

I mean, part of that might be because I look different, but more than

anything, I can tell that everyone here is eager to see me for who I really am. And that makes me really happy.

After classes end for the day, I go to the principal's office and sit down to talk to Tsukasa Houjou.

"So how was it? What did you think of our academy?" the principal asks with a gentle smile, and I give my honest observation.

"...It was impressive. The lessons are easy to follow, the facilities are incredibly nice...and the thing that left the biggest impression was how much the students seem to enjoy being here."

There's a certain glow to all the students here.

At my current high school, everyone finds the school day a huge drag.

This mindset is so prevalent that even the students who devote themselves to club activities complain about how boring class is or mutter how they want to go home during breaks.

I didn't hear those words even once during my time here.

I'm sure it's not that they're never uttered, but the fact that I haven't heard it at all speaks volumes.

Everyone looks like they're enjoying themselves, and they're making the most of their time here.

That's the strongest impression today left on me.

...And everyone here didn't care that I was bullied at my school and welcomed me with open arms.

That, more than anything else, is what made me happy.

Not only is everyone enjoying themselves, but everyone accepts me as I am and looks at me for who I am...

Honestly, I really want to attend.

But...

Hearing my words, the principal nods, content.

"I see. It makes me happy to hear you say that... So how about it? Will you join us here?"

"...Are you sure someone like me should be here?"

Am I really a valuable enough person to attend this school?

I still haven't found anything I'm good at or anything I can be proud of without reserve.

There has to be someone better, someone more deserving than me...

As those thoughts swirl in my head, the principal gently speaks to me, as though he can tell what I'm thinking.

"Yuuya. Your value is something that's decided both by yourself and by others."

"Huh?"

"And right now, you're wondering if you're worthy of attending this school... Am I right?"

“...Yes,” I answer after a moment’s pause.

“Well, I think you’re worthy of attending this school.”

“Oh...”

At those words, I look straight at the principal.

“It’s all right. Even if you can’t find your worth no matter how hard you try...you can take your time to find it as you study here. You have time.”

“—”

The principal’s words pierce my heart.

And—

“Um...I still have a lot to learn, but if it’s okay, I’d like to attend this academy.”

“Of course! Welcome, Yuuya.”

I formally accept the invitation to attend Ousei Academy.

“Then, if you’ll excuse me.”

“Hello again.”

“Huh?”

After receiving my uniform and things I need for school, I leave the principal’s office only to find Kaori waiting for me with her school bag in hand.

“It seems you’ll be joining us here.”

“...I’m still not confident I belong here yet, but even so, I want to be a part of this school.”

“That pleases me to no end, and I’m sure my father feels the same way.”

Kaori flashes a gentle smile, making me feel a little shy. I hurry and change the subject.

“O-oh, so what brings you here? Do you have something you need to talk to the principal about?”

“No, I’m here to see you, Yuuya.”

“M-me?”

I’m surprised by the wholly unexpected answer.

See me...? What for?

“Ousei Academy is in the opposite direction from your old school, is it not?”

“Huh? Well, yes...”

“Then you probably don’t know much about this neighborhood, yes?”

...It’s true. I never went out much because of my appearance.

At most, I’d go buy whatever I needed on the way home from school.

As a result, I’ve never even gone for a walk in the opposite direction from school.

“S-since it’s a nice opportunity, I was hoping to show you around, Yuuya... A-and! I’d like to thank you personally!”

“O-oh, no, please! You already thanked me enough. And more than anything, the fact that I can attend school here is already more than I deserve...”

Everyone here is treating me far better than I could have ever dreamed.

To receive anything else...

As I’m thinking that, Kaori falls into thought for a moment before speaking again.

“...In that case... What if it’s because I want to walk around town with you, Yuuya...? Would that be acceptable?”

“Huh?”

“As embarrassing as it is to admit, I haven’t had many opportunities to simply go somewhere with a gentleman...”

“Huh?! Why?”

“It’s unavoidable, but largely because of my family and my father’s position, I’m afraid they’re all a bit hesitant to approach me... So I thought it would be nice to go with you, Yuuya, as you’re the first gentleman I’ve ever gotten to know...”

Kaori says this with a hint of sadness in her voice.

Ah, I see... I’ve always looked enviously at the rich, but they’re also people with their own problems and worries.

Kaori fixes me with a faintly anxious look. Seeing her expression, the pedestal that I’d unwittingly placed her on collapses. She’s a human being, just like me.

I blush as I confess something to Kaori.

“Um...I’m also embarrassed to admit it, but I’ve never gone anywhere with a girl, either...”

“Oh?”

“So if you’re willing...can you show me around?”

“...Of course! There’s lots of shops that sell delicious things around the school, so let’s be off!”

Seeing Kaori’s beaming expression, I find my heart warming as well.

“I’m told that everyone flocks to the various cafés and restaurants in this area after school.”

“Wow...!”

There’s lots of spots lining the wide, straight stretch of road. Cars are prohibited from driving on the road where I can see not just students from Ousei Academy, but also kids from other schools as well. Lampposts and trees are placed at regular intervals in the middle of the street.

“I didn’t know it was such a fancy place...”

“Indeed. Some of these shops even get featured on TV programs from time to time.”

Interesting. In particular, there seems to be a lot of stores that appeal to young women.

As I scan the area, something occurs to me.

“Oh, that reminds me... Kaori, how did you know it was me?”

“Huh?”

“I hate to admit it, really, but I’m pretty sure I currently look quite different from when I got beat up by those delinquents...”

“Are you sure? But your eyes were the same, so I could tell it was you right away.”

“Huh, my eyes?”

“Yes,” Kaori replies confidently with a smile, and I blink in shock.

“I suppose some parts of your appearance have changed, Yuuya, but your gentle and honest eyes haven’t changed at all. That’s how I knew it was you the moment I saw you.”

My gentle and honest eyes... I don’t know if that’s what my eyes look like, but it seems that’s how they appear to Kaori.

Despite the fact that so much of my body has drastically changed, it doesn’t matter at all to Kaori. To her, the fact that my eyes haven’t changed is more important.

It almost feels like Kaori is saying she’s always seen me for who I am. I can’t help feeling happy.

We walk along as we chat until Kaori finds something that catches her interest.

“Yuuya, why don’t we go there?!”

“Mm?”

I look in the direction Kaori is pointing and spot some high school girls thoroughly enjoying their crepes.

“The crepe shop?”

“Yes! Their crepes have a reputation for being really good, so I’ve always wanted to try them! Let’s go!”

“Huh? Whoa!”

Kaori, who’s looked really happy ever since we got to this area, grabs me by the hand and pulls me forward.

Since it’s a place with a great reputation, the line’s pretty long.

“Wh-whoa! Look over there!”

“Huh? No way! What a hottie! Think he’s alone?”

“Of course not, duh! Look at the pretty girl next to him.”

“Oh, you’re right. What a beautiful couple... Jealous!”

“Yeah. The girl’s so classy, and that boy’s really cool looking...”

“Y’know...I’m jealous, but it’s just kind of refreshing to see such a nice couple.”

Since it’s a sweets shop, a lot of the people in line are women.

I—I won't weird out anyone even if I'm a guy, right? I get really worried about that sort of thing.

I'm trembling inside as we join the line, when Kaori finally notices something.

"Oh...oh! I-I'm so sorry! I grabbed your hand without thinking..."

"Huh? Oh...that! No, it's my fault."

We both turn bright red as we hurriedly let go of each other's hands. Since Kaori and I both hadn't been thinking about it at first, we're both really self-conscious about it all of a sudden.

The people around us are watching our every move.

"...Hey."

"...Hmm?"

"Those two are super adorable, aren't they?"

"...Totally."

" "So precious." "

Grabbing a girl's hand like that... Erm... Ugh, how embarrassing...

I—I hope she doesn't hate me now. Did I mess up?

Up until now, girls usually recoiled when my hand so much as brushed up against them, and they even treated things I touched as though they were toxic waste. Thinking back on it makes me want to cry.

I look worriedly in Kaori's direction. Her face is flushed as she looks down at her hand.

"I—I... This is the first time I've held the hand of a man who isn't my father..."

"....."

Gaaaaaah! I'm going to die of embarrassment!

I do my best to freeze my facial muscles in place and maintain my poker face. If I fail, I'm pretty sure I'll drop dead on the spot.

While I'm panicking internally, I do register that she doesn't seem to hate me for holding on to her hand, which helps me relax a little.

...Man, Kaori's so nice. I'm sorry I'm the first person you held hands with.

The line has steadily advanced during this whole awkward interaction, and soon we reach the front, where we look at the menu.

"Wow, there's a lot..."

"They all look really good! I'm afraid I can't decide..."

Kaori looks like she's seriously struggling to figure out what to order, but she ultimately chooses a strawberry and whipped cream crepe, while I choose the blueberry and whipped cream one.

There's benches installed along the street, and since one of them just opened up, we take a seat.

Oh, I just realized... I think this is my first crepe ever.

I know what they look like and what they're called, but I never had

an opportunity to have one. I mean, I never had any spare money, so I couldn't buy one.

We each take a bite, and we can't help but exchange glances.

“It's so good!”

The tartness of the blueberry and the sweetness of the whipped cream complement each other perfectly, and the soft, supple crepe ties it all together... Okay, yes, I can see why so many girls like sweets. I'm a fan now, too.

Still, if I get carried away and eat too much, I might end up as fat as before, so I better be careful.

“Oh, this is happiness... Sweets really are wonderful.”

“Agreed. It makes me want to try one of everything on the menu someday.”

If I have another opportunity to come here, I'll have to make sure to order a different flavor.

Right as I privately swear an oath, Kaori offers her strawberry crepe with a smile.

“Would you like a bite?”

“Eh?!”

W-wait, take a bite...? Isn't that practically an indirect kiss?!

In contrast to my panicked thoughts, Kaori regards me with a curious expression as she gently presses her crepe to my mouth.

“Here, it's delicious!”

“Mrrmph!”

I reflexively take a bite...

“How is it?”

“...It's really good.”

My face feels like it's on fire. Given the circumstances, I actually can't even tell what it tastes like.

I've gone completely rigid as I chew on my mouthful of crepe, when Kaori seems to finally realize what just transpired.

“!!!”

Kaori looks at her crepe for a second before her face flashes scarlet in the blink of an eye. Then she lets out what looks like a silent scream.

Aw, crap, is she mad at me now?

I look at Kaori with worry in my heart, but she hides her face, using her crepe as a shield.

“I-I'm sorry... I'm too embarrassed to look in your direction right now, Yuuya...”

“Um... No, I'm sorry to put you through that. I know it's unpleasant.”

“N-no! I don't find it unpleasant at all... But um...it's still...an indirect k-kiss, and... Um...I...”

Oh, that's a relief. I still feel bad I embarrassed her, but I'm glad she isn't mad at me, at least...

I once again let out a heartfelt sigh of relief, but it seems my mind's still reeling, and I drop a bombshell of my own.

"Um... O-oh, right! Kaori, do you want a bite from mine? Oh, wait..."

"Eh?!"

What am I doiiiiing...?!

Who makes the same exact offer right after we just recovered from the sheer embarrassment of the first time...?!

I-in my defense, Kaori gave me a bite of her crepe, so I really just wanted to return the favor, but...

As I stare off into the distance, gripped by dismay, I notice Kaori turning redder than I've ever seen her, and she replies in a soft voice while keeping her eyes on the ground.

"...Y-yes...please..."

"....."

—I honestly don't remember what happened next.

Both Kaori and I were so nervous after we finished eating our crepes that we were just a little out of it.

In the end, I remember climbing into the car that had come to bring Kaori home and asking them drop me off at my house, but... I couldn't even look at her the entire time we were in the car.

The butler who had been with Kaori when she came to invite me to Ousei Academy regarded us with a gentle, warm expression as she watched over us.

Now that I think about it, while we were waiting for our ride home, the people around us were also watching us with that same gentle gaze—

"...Look."

"...Mm?"

"...That's young love."

"...Yeep."

"Adorable."

"Totally."

"*Sigh*, so precious." "

—Of course, we didn't notice the conversations popping up in our wake.

Yesterday, I spent the day as a trial student at Ousei Academy, then went out with Kaori after class, but I'm not going to start at Ousei Academy right away. On the other hand, I've already finished the process of leaving my previous school, so I have the day off.

Given that I haven't been able to go to the other world lately, I

decide to pay it a visit.

“I’m not seeing anything out of the ordinary...”

While it’s the first time I’ve been here in a few days, my house and garden in the other world don’t seem to have changed much.

Oh, as an aside, whenever I’m in the other world, I put on the Royal Silk Shirt and Slacks, then wear the Armor of the Bloodstained Ogre over them.

Today, my plan is to venture deeper into the woods, since I haven’t seen much of it yet.

Of course, I’ve readied a lot of healing medicines just in case.

“It’s nice to know that my Map skill can get me home even if I get lost.”

I warily cross the property boundary and begin my exploration.

Up until now, my little trips have been limited to the direction heading straight away from my garden gate.

That’s why this time, I’m going to check out the forest behind my house. Based on the fact that I ran into that girl and those soldiers out in front, that direction must lead to the wider world.

By contrast, the woodlands grow thicker and darker as I head in the opposite direction.

Not only do I have my skill Detect Presence up, but I’m also extremely vigilant as I proceed. Before long, I detect a single living creature nearby.

I activate my One with Nature skill and hold my breath as I approach, finding a giant bear eating a monster it’s just killed.

The bear has scarlet fur and three wicked-looking horns growing from its forehead.

In addition, its jaws and teeth are easily tearing and chewing through the dead monster’s flesh and bones.

It’s also a whole lot bigger than I am.

I activate my Appraise skill.

Devil Bear

Level: 450, **Mana:** 4500, **Attack:** 10500, **Defense:** 6000, **Agility:** 2000, **Intelligence:** 3500, **Luck:** 500

I’ve finally run into an enemy with over 10,000 in a single stat.

Compared to the Devil Bear’s, mine are more balanced, but the fact that its attack is over 10,000 is a problem.

...Can I actually kill it?

It’s hard to imagine while I’m going through my peaceful daily routine in Japan, but once I set foot in this world, my mind immediately switches over to that sort of kill-or-be-killed mindset.

Still, I figure that's a necessary part of surviving here, so I'm not particularly afraid of the fact that I'm thinking this way. Since it doesn't occur to me at all when I'm on Earth, maybe this state of mind only comes out when I'm in this world.

In the end, I decide to attack the Devil Bear.

I figure I'll end up fighting it eventually anyway. Besides, since I still don't know how strong monsters in this part of the woods are and I don't know where the Devil Bear sits on the food chain, I should take this chance to set a baseline.

I immediately reach into the Item Box and bring out the Void Bow.

The Void Bow is a bow with no form. That means it's invisible to the naked eye.

However, I can feel its presence clearly in my hand.

Next, it responds to my will, and I create an invisible arrow.

I hold my breath and nock the invisible arrow against the bowstring as I quietly aim for the Devil Bear.

And then—

“—!”

“?! G-graaagh?!”

The invisible arrow stabs into the Devil Bear's left eye.

The bear lets out a roar of shock and pain at the surprise attack.

However, it's a creature that makes its home deep in these woods, and despite the fact that I haven't shown myself, it immediately figures out where I am based on the arrow's flight path and glares intensely in my direction.

“Guess that's the most I can do with the bow... Up next is this!”

I take out my favored Absolute Spear, and I close the distance with the Devil Bear before thrusting directly at it.

“Yah!”

“Graaargh!”

“!”

Surprisingly, the Devil Bear uses its powerful claws to meet my spear thrust head-on.

The Devil Bear gets the better of that exchange, its incredible strength overwhelming my attack and throwing me backward.

“Urkl!”

I somehow regain control in midair, and the moment I land on my feet, I back up several paces.

As expected, the Devil Bear originally intended to follow up on its attack, but the moment I put some distance between us, it drops into a wary defensive stance.

We stare off for a while, then the Devil Bear makes the next move.

“Grrrrr... Graaaaaagh!”

“What the—?!”

The Devil Bear spews a stream of scorching flame from its mouth.

I quickly roll out of the way to avoid the fiery breath.

...That's gotta be magic, right?

Since none of the monsters I've encountered so far have used any magic, the Devil Bear's flames rattled me more than I expected.

Man, I wish I could use magic like this Devil Bear and those soldiers.

I gotta wonder...do I have to wait until I'm thirty? I mean, I think I have what it takes to be a great wizard, but... Huh? That's strange. I'm sweating from my eyes...

As I ponder silly things in my mind, I once again focus on figuring out how to deal with the Devil Bear's magic.

If I approach too carelessly, I'll end up being roasted by its flames...

While I'm still busy thinking, the Devil Bear spews another gout of fire and launches fireballs in my general direction.

I continue avoiding the attacks by contorting my body, but at this rate, it's going to land a hit sooner or later. Will the Devil Bear's mana give out first or will my endurance...? Honestly, given that it's a stronger opponent, I'm pretty sure my endurance is gonna be the first to go.

Meaning I need to distract the bear with a feint and finish it off while it's distracted.

Since I still don't have much experience coming up with battle plans on the fly, that's about the only solution I can think of.

...Oh, screw it, I can't spend forever thinking about it! Let's just see how it goes!

I steel myself and rush the Devil Bear.

"Grah!"

In response, the Devil Bear emits another stream of fire and sweeps it from side to side like a flamethrower, possibly to keep me from getting any closer. Hey, bear! What are you going to do if you start a forest fire?!

That's when I notice that the Devil Bear's flames aren't setting the trees alight, so maybe it's a special kind of fire.

Not that it matters right now. More importantly, I can't approach at all because of the waves of fire, so I retreat to the edge of the bear's range.

"Gruuuuh?!"

Spotting my sudden movement, the Devil Bear lets out a roar of surprise.

I ignore it, and from my low crouch, I throw the Absolute Spear at the Devil Bear.

"! Graaaaaargh!"

Looks like it initially wanted to knock down the spear with a burst of its flames, but it apparently figured out that would be impossible

based on the Absolute Spear's properties, and the Devil Bear tries to deal with it using its menacing claws again.

"Now!"

Since the Devil Bear is preparing to meet the spear with claws instead of flame, its fiery barrier is down, giving me an opening to rush in.

"Grah?!"

The Devil Bear lets out a sound of shock as I close in at high speed, but it reacts and swipes at me with its vicious-looking claws.

"Hyah...!"

Concluding in a split second that if I dodge and back away now, I won't get another chance this good, I opt to kick with all my might at the Devil Bear's arm.

"Raaah!"

"Gruuuuooargh?!"

Recalling the lessons I learned from the books I bought, I firmly plant my foot on the ground and pour all of my strength into that one kick.

The attack knocks away the Devil Bear's arm, and it loses its footing.

Exploiting its lack of balance, I immediately step closer to the Devil Bear's torso, away from its grasping claws.

I ready the Infinite Gauntlet on my arm.

"Hyaaaaah!"

Using the momentum from my kick, I throw a punch with all of my power behind it right at the Devil Bear's stomach.

"Gaaaaaaah?!"

Just one punch.

But then the Infinite Gauntlet activates.

Once you land a single blow with the Infinite Gauntlet, it automatically hits the target again multiple times with the same amount of strength.

The only way to defend against it is to block or deflect at least one attack.

And of course, the Devil Bear has no way of doing that.

My unstoppable flurry of blows slams into the Devil Bear's gut until it finally hacks up blood before flying backward. When it lands behind me, it breathes its last.

I hold up my fist high in the air like some famous champion fighter.



“Now, what are the drops...?”

I check the raw materials that the Devil Bear dropped.

Scarlet Fur of the Fiendish Bear—Fur of the Devil Bear. Has natural resistance to fire and is extremely warm, but it isn't all that comfortable to the touch.

Meat of the Fiendish Bear—Meat of the Devil Bear. The meat gets too tough to eat when roasted but becomes extremely tender when simmered.

Blood of the Fiendish Bear—Blood of the Devil Bear. Can be used to craft magic items, but it can also be drunk on its own. It has a pleasant, clean taste and can also be used as bouillon for soup. Grants resistance to fire when drunk.

“Wait, blood...?”

The drops are a rough, spiky red pelt, a ton of meat wrapped in mysterious leaves, and a ton of blood inside a big bottle.

“I don't get what this flame resistance is supposed to do for me, though... But if I can eat it, maybe I can use it in my cooking.”

Some people might avoid blood, but I've never been a picky eater. For most of my life, I haven't had enough money to be picky.

After confirming the various effects and tossing them into the Item Box, I then look at the remaining items.

Magic Stone: A—Rank A. A special ore that can be obtained when killing monsters with mana.

Flame Guitar—A rare drop item that can occasionally be acquired by killing a Devil Bear. When playing music with this guitar, it motivates you and transforms you into an intense, passionate individual. When mastered, it allows you to control fire.

“The Magic Stone is one thing, but a guitar...?”

I'm also a little surprised that the Magic Stone's rank is A, too.

It was a fairly high level and used magic to boot, so I figured the bear was actually an S-rank monster, but I guess it's still considered nothing more than a high-level A-rank monster, same rank as the Goblin General.

In that case, I can't even imagine what sort of beast an S-rank monster might be.

“Oh well. The only thing I still don't get is this guitar...”

The description says it a rare drop item, but why a guitar?

I would have preferred jewelry like the Necklace of the Black Moon that dropped when I killed the Hell Slime...

And then there's the fact that... the only things I've ever played are recorders and keyboard harmonicas. It's not like I had the spare cash to buy instruments for fun.

Then again, it says that once mastered, it'll grant me the ability to control flames, but... It doesn't sound like that's directly related to magic, so I wonder what it actually means in practice?

"...On the other hand, I do have some free time for once... Maybe I should buy a guitar lesson book for beginners at the bookstore and give it a try?"

I've never had any hobbies before, so it might be a good opportunity to pick one up.

As I'm thinking about the guitar, a message appears in front of me.

"You have gained a level."

"Ah, it went up."

It makes sense that it's easier to gain levels when fighting strong opponents. Of course, that comes with a lot more risk.

I immediately pull up my stats.

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 235, **Mana:** 5900, **Attack:** 7900, **Defense:** 7900, **Agility:** 7900, **Intelligence:** 5400, **Luck:** 8400, **BP:** 200

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, True Art of War: 7, Detect Presence, Cooking: 5, Speed Reading, Map, Dodge, Detect Weakness, One with Nature

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

"Wow, I've gained two levels."

Not only did my level go up, but my True Art of War level went up as well. That's a good sign.

For the moment, I don't have a lot of BP, so I spend all of it on luck and raise it to 8,600.

"All right, then let's go a little farther."

After checking everything to my satisfaction, I once again head deeper into the woods.

As Yuuya was busy exploring the woods, there was a major stir occurring in Earth's fashion industry.

“Hey, did you see the pictures?!”

“I did! You’re talking about the guy who was with Miu, right?”

“Who is that boy? What agency does he belong to?”

“We don’t have a clue...”

After Miu’s fashion shoot with Yuuya, a single subject dominated conversations at Miu’s talent agency.

The information-gathering ability of the talent industry was impressive, and the mystery man who was in the same shoot as Miu—that is to say, Yuuya—was the talk of the town.

This was all despite not much time passing since the photo shoot itself.

The frenzy of interest wasn’t just because the pictures included Miu, a bona fide rising star, but also because the photographer, Hikaru, was an extremely famous figure in the industry.

“Hey, find out more about that boy!”

“What’s his name?!”

“What are our scouts doing?!”

“Pull out all the stops to sign him!”

Multiple agencies in the fashion industry had already started their efforts to add Yuuya to their lineup.

However, when the agency asked Miu about Yuuya, she mentioned that it was private information and added that she didn’t know his name, either. Hikaru was the rare type who had no interest in the machinations of the competing talent agencies and, like Miu, refused to divulge Yuuya’s name.

Which was why no one among the talent agencies knew his identity.

Miu, Hikaru, and even Yuuya himself weren’t sure if this was the right decision.

However, Miu and Hikaru had acted out of respect for Yuuya, while Yuuya wouldn’t have even dreamed he was the subject of such rumor, so it didn’t matter much.

Besides, Yuuya was currently a bit of a shut-in.

The only times he left his house were when he ran out of necessities that he couldn’t acquire from the other world or when it was time to go to school. He was incredibly well-stocked, so it would have been a challenge to randomly encounter him in town.

Currently, Yuuya enjoyed exploring a strange new world more than anything else, and unless there was something extremely important, he wasn’t going to quit going on his adventures.

—But it was only a matter of time before the wider world learned about Yuuya’s existence.

CHAPTER 6

A New Life

Today, I'll be starting my life as a student at Ousei Academy.

I thought there would be various procedures I'd have to go through to transfer, but it seems the principal has already taken care of everything, and there was almost nothing for me to do. I really can't thank him enough.

At any rate, I'm just excited about the fact that I'll get to attend Ousei Academy every day.

Oh, the only niggle is that while I have a new uniform, some auxiliary stuff like my textbooks and gym clothes aren't ready yet, so I'll get them tomorrow.

I'll just have to share textbooks and sit out of gym class until then.

Those are my thoughts as I walk to school. Before long, I start to see other students in Ousei uniforms.

"Hold up, is that...?"

"That's the kid they were talking about the other day, right?!"

"Wow... He's ridiculously handsome!"

"Damn... Is he a model or something...?"

"Hold on, I've never seen anyone that good-looking."

Hrm... I feel like people are staring. Is the uniform not fitting right?

I'm a little worried as I reach the school grounds, but I decide to go say hi to the principal at his office.

He welcomes me with the usual gentle smile.

"Ah, it looks good on you."

"A-are you sure? I felt a lot of people looking at me, so I was worried it didn't fit me right..."

"Hrm... It might be best if you start by building some confidence in yourself."

"Huh?"

"No, it's nothing. In any case, you'll be starting your new life at this academy, but...as I mentioned the other day, your textbooks and gym

clothes won't be ready until tomorrow. Sorry about that."

"No! Not at all."

"Thank you for understanding. You should be able to pick them up sometime tomorrow morning."

"Yes, thank you so much."

After wrapping up official business, I spend a little time chatting with the principal.

When it's about time for me to get to my classroom, the principal wraps up our conversation with a final comment.

"If there's anything you have trouble with, don't hesitate to talk to me. But there will be times when I'm not here. In those situations, feel free to consult my daughter, Kaori, instead. I've already mentioned it to her, so don't be shy."

"You really are spoiling me... Thank you so very much."

I bow, my heart filled with appreciation.

"Don't worry about that. Now, off to class with you. Your new life awaits."

"Yes, sir!"

I bow once again, then head to class.

"So once again, welcome your new classmate, Yuuya Tenjou. It's only been about a day since you last saw him, but be nice to him, got it?"

"Yes, ma'am!"

I'm in the same class as before. I can see Ryou and Shingo smiling and waving at me.

...Wow. So many people are happy to see me...

I feel myself tearing up at the sheer gap between how people treat me now versus the past, but I manage to keep it together long enough to finish my introduction and sit down at the same desk I used.

I take a moment to say hi to my neighbor.

"It's good to see you again, Hyoudou. Also, I hate to ask, but...it seems my textbooks won't be ready until tomorrow, so can I share yours today?"

"...Mm-hmm, good to see you. And you can call me Yukine. We can share, no problem."

"Thanks!"

Hyoudou...or rather, Yukine is a really nice person. I need to figure out some way to thank her.

Those are the kinds of thoughts that fill my mind as I begin my first school day in my new class.

"Whoa..."

It's time for the afternoon's classes.

After having lunch with Ryou and Shingo, the next class ends up

being gym class. For two straight periods.

Since I get kind of sleepy after lunch, I'm grateful for any chance to move around for class.

Oh, but since I don't have my gym clothes yet, I'm just observing today.

In front of me, Ryou is dribbling a soccer ball with his feet, skillfully weaving past multiple defenders. It seems Shingo is on the same team, and he's currently lurking in front of their goal. Since I was never much good at sports, I totally understand the desire to just hang out back there.

"Ack! Hey, someone stop Ryou!"

"Uh, we've already got three guys on him!"

"If you can't stop him with three, then put five on him!"

With that, five players from the other team home in on him, but seeing that, Ryou just smirks.

"That's a bad idea. And here's why."

""Gaaaah!""

Ryou flicks the ball upward with his heel and sends it arcing over the heads of the five blocking him. He rushes forward and breaks through the defense to catch up with the ball when it comes back down.

"Wow... Shingo mentioned that Ryou's amazing, but damn, he really is crazy..."

"Riiight? I'm sure the guys on his team are happy, but everyone on the other team is in a total panic!"

"Huh?"

My murmur was mostly an observation to myself, but I suddenly got an unexpected response.

I look over in surprise and see a sporty-looking girl with a ponytail.

"Oh, did I surprise you?"

"A little... Um...?"

I know she's in the same class, but I haven't memorized everyone's names yet.

She apparently picked that up from my expression, as she offers an apologetic bob of her head.

"Sorry, sorry. You haven't learned all our names yet, right...? I'm Kaede Kazama! Hope we can get along, Yuuya."

"Thanks, I hope so, too, Kazama."

When I answer that way, she lets out a dry chuckle.

"You can call me Kaede! I'll be calling you Yuuya, after all."

"Oh, okay."

You know, now that I think about it, everyone's fine calling each other by first name... Maybe a little too friendly and frank for me?

As I'm pondering this, the other girls come closer and start cheering

on the guys.

“Go get ‘em!”

“Yeah, go, go!”

“C’mon, run faster!”

I’m a little surprised at the sight and turn to ask Kaede, “Are the girls on break?”

“Yup. When we do, a lot of us come watch the boys play! It’s more fun watching your games!”

“I see...”

I nod at Kaede’s observation and turn my attention back to the pitch. Morale among the players has shot up, and they’re all moving with much more vigor now. It’s very easy to understand why.

“Aaall right! Bear witness! My elegant skills...!”

“No, no, they should focus on me!”

“Yeah, yeah, but more importantly...”

“Stop Ryou no matter what it takes!”

Unlike last time, everyone but the goalie runs off to try to stop Ryou.

“Whoa?! Wh-what the heck’s going on?!”

“Hand over that ball!”

“Nope, it’s mine!”

“Out of the way! Coming through!”

Ryou’s face twists up in an exasperated smile as the boys charge him like a pack of demons.

“O-okay, this is a little too many to handle...!”

“Gotcha!”

As the opposing team lets out a shout of triumph, Ryou laughs as he’s mobbed.

“Hey now... Soccer’s a team sport, guys.”

“Huh?!”

Ryou passes the ball at his feet to one of his teammates.

“Ahhhhh!”

“Y’all are such dummies...”

Since all of the players other than the goalie had rushed over to Ryou, the path to the opposing goal is wide open.

A handsome guy with silky blond hair receives Ryou’s pass.

“Heh-heh-heh... I’ve got the ball now. Give up all hope and behold my ultimate technique...!”

After brushing back his bangs, he puts an enormous amount of power behind his kick—sending the ball flying in our direction.

“Huh?!”

“Hey, you idiot! Where the hell are you aiming?!” Ryou shouts in alarm as the kicker stares in shock.

While that exchange happens, the ball keeps coming in our direction

at extreme speed. Just how much did he put behind that kick...?

That aside, the sudden turn of events catches all the girls, including Kaede, by surprise, and they don't have time to move much. Several of them scream as they crouch for cover.

When I see that, my body moves on reflex.

I stand in front of Kaede, who is in the direct path of the ball, and then perform a jumping volley shot.

Even though the ball's hurtling forward at ridiculous speed, my leg solidly connects with the ball, sending it straight at the goal Ryou's team was trying to score on.

And then—

“N-no way...”

“A goal...”

“Seriously...?”

The ball rockets away at incredibly high speed and flies right into the net.

I land neatly and turn to Kaede, who's behind me, eyes open wide.

“You okay?”

“...Huh?! Ah, um... Y-yup! Totally fine!”

“Okay. Good.”

I'm just glad she isn't hurt.

Thanks to the fact that my physical abilities are a lot better since I started going to the other world, I was able to deal with the stray shot before anything bad could happen.

Now that I think back to the time I fended off that aggressive man during the incident with Miu, is it possible I've gotten fairly strong? Putting that aside for the moment, I'm mostly happy I was able to react in time.

The experience of deflecting the Devil Bear's powerful claws with a kick is probably what helped me nail that shot.

I'm relieved to see that everyone's okay, and my lips naturally curl into a smile. Kaede looks a bit flushed for a moment before quickly shaking her head and asking: “...Wow! Y-Yuuya! How did you do that?! I've only seen that sort of move in manga!”

“Huh? Mm-hmm... Even if you ask me how... I just did it, I guess...”

After lots of practice in the other world, I've gotten much more comfortable moving my body however I want. Still, it's not like it came that easily, especially in the beginning. There were plenty of times when my body would move, but my brain couldn't keep up.

That does make me wonder, though—what would Kaede think if she saw the way I moved when I was fighting the Devil Bear?

As we chat, the other girls come up to me and thank me as well.

Eventually, Ryou joins us.

“Sorry about that. You guys okay?”

“Yup. Yuuya kept us safe.”

“Phew, I’m glad to hear that. But man, Yuuya, that was seriously amazing. Maybe you should try joining one of the clubs.”

“Huh?! Yuuya, you’re in the go home club?!” Kaede sounds shocked.

“Y-yeah...”

Wouldn’t it be weirder otherwise? Until recently, I was super overweight and had trouble even doing everyday activities.

“Then again, it’s true that you don’t look all that muscular, Yuuya.”

“What are you—K-Kaede?!”

While I’m busy thinking back to how I looked just a short while ago, Kaede suddenly starts feeling up my arms and stomach.

“Woow! I couldn’t tell from just looking, but you’re really toned! These muscles are rock-hard!”

“Y-yeah?”

“Definitely. I train a lot because I’m on the track team, but I’m having trouble putting on muscle. See? I’m pretty soft, right?”

“Whaaa—?!”

With my guard completely down, Kaede easily grabs my hand and presses it against her stomach. S-so soft... Wait, no, hang on!

“K-Kaede? Um...I don’t think it’s a good idea to let guys touch your body so casually...”

“Oh? Ah...s-sorry! I did it without thinking...”

Kaede hurriedly lets go of my arm and scratches her faintly blushing cheeks.

Yeah, no, I’m pretty sure doing that without meaning to has its own host of problems! Also, talk about a low guard?!

“Ah, um!”

Suddenly, someone shouts loudly in our direction.

When I turn toward the voice, the blond guy who kicked that stray ball is standing there.

I’m wondering what he wants, when he sinks low and presses his head against the ground in apology.

“I’m soooooooooo sorry!”

I catch myself staring at the sharp movements of his groveling when Kaede speaks up.

“It’s fine, it’s fine! I’m not hurt, see?”

“Ooh... You’re going to forgive me...? I’ll devote my life to you...!”

“Eh... No, I’ll pass...”

“Damn it all to hell!”

Man, this guy’s funny.

I never met anyone like him at my old school, but he seems like a good guy at heart.

After he stands up, he turns to me.

“And you... You were a huge help. Thank you.”

“Yeah, I’m just glad I was able to do something about it. Let’s be more careful next time.”

“I’ll do my best!”

With that, he then introduces himself like the thought only just occurred to him.

“Oh, you probably don’t remember all our names yet, so allow me to formally introduce myself. I’m Akira Ichinose. I’m the famed prince of Ousei Academy...!”

“Huh, that’s news to me...”

Ryou interjects with a weary chuckle. “As you can see, Akira’s a bit of an oddball, but he’s not a bad guy. It might take you a while to get used to him, though.”

“Oh, come now, I’m like any other ordinary fellow. See?”

As he says that, he brushes back his bangs as if to emphasize his point. Ordinarily, it might be seen as an expression of arrogance or narcissism, but for some reason, Akira makes it seem like neither. That’s impressive in its own way.

He’s definitely a character, but I don’t get any bad vibes from him... Ousei Academy is a great place. A far cry from my last school.

I can’t help but think that yet again.

After gym class, Kaede and the other girls headed to the changing room to get dressed.

Once there, they ran into girls from the next class already changing into their gym clothes.

Kaori was among those students, and Kaede called over to her while changing.

“Hey, Kaori! Oh, do you guys have gym next?”

“Yes. How was gym class for you?”

Kaede’s eyes glittered at those words.

“Oh yeah, you gotta hear this! Yuuya the transfer student is amazing!”

“Huh? Yuuya?”

“Yup, yup! The boys were playing soccer in class today, and Akira accidentally kicked the ball toward the sidelines. The ball was heading right for me, and I thought, *It’s gonna hit me!* But then Yuuya pulled off some amazing move and kicked it far away. What’s even crazier is that he managed to send it right into the goal! Isn’t that amazing?!”

“A-amazing moves?”

As Kaede excitedly recounted her story, Kaori asked for context in a bout of confusion.

Yukine, who was changing next to Kaede, chimed in as she took off her gym clothes.

“...Mm-hmm. Kaede’s right. That was the sort of move you’d only

see in, like...manga or anime.”

“I know, right?! It was insane!”

“Really...?”

“It was awesome!”

“Yup. I don’t know how else to put it... It was like he was a prince!”

Kaede’s excitement was plain to see.

“Oh, I totally get it! He’s got that kind of aura,” Yukine agreed.

The other girls also began discussing Yuuya once Kaede and Yukine kicked it off.

Kaori let out a breath of relief after learning that Yuuya was fitting in well with his new class.

But then Kaede voiced a question that had just occurred to her.

“I wonder if Yuuya has a girlfriend.”

“Huh?! Y-Yuuya has a girlfriend...?”

“Oh, no! I don’t know anything about that! But well, considering how hot he is...”

“Ah, right... That’s, um, yes, true.”

Kaori felt a surge of panic when she misheard Kaede, followed by another sigh of relief after it was cleared up. But then she cocked her head quizzically, not sure why she felt so reassured by the news.

“Oh! We gotta hurry if we want to catch the next class!”

“Right! Sorry for talking your ear off!”

“No, no, please don’t worry about it.”

“Have fun in gym class!”

Kaede and her classmates belatedly realized how much time had passed when they glanced at the clock and raced to finish changing before dashing out of the changing room.

“...? What is this strange feeling...?”



Kaori furrowed her brow in thought as she wrestled with emotions she had never felt before.

“...Princess Lexia has returned safely.”

“...What?”

Montress was the royal capital located at the heart of the Arselian Kingdom.

There, in one of the rooms of the royal palace, a man was delivering a report.

“You mean...they failed?”

“...Yes, that would appear to be the case.”

“...Explain precisely what happened.”

“Of course... It seems the plan to draw out the knights protecting Her Highness succeeded. However, then Her Highness ran into...the Weald.”

“What?”

The man furrowed his brow at the hooded figure's words.

“The Weald... Why did she venture in there?”

“It seemed Her Highness was not aware that it was the Weald, and those assigned to the mission followed her too far into the woods and as a result...met their ends.”

“Those fools... The monsters found there are abnormally strong. To even set foot in those woodlands... Wait. Lexia survived?”

“Yes... It seems that the escorting knights defeated the assault mounted by our comrades and then proceeded to find Princess Lexia before taking her into their custody.”

“...That makes no sense. Both my assassins and Lexia stepped into the Weald, yet my assassins are dead and Lexia is not. Were they not all attacked by monsters? Or did the knights make it there in time to kill the assassins?”

“My apologies. The reports are not sufficiently detailed...”

“Hmph, useless.”

The hooded figure was openly apologetic.

The man looked down upon the hooded figure, but his eyes briefly went wide as his gaze took on a sharp gleam.

“Surely...my part in this hasn't gotten out, has it?”

“...I cannot say for certain, but I believe you need not worry on that account.”

The man in charge took a sip from his wine as he leaned back in a sumptuous chair.

He then threw his glass at the hooded figure in front of him.

“Ngh.”

“You can't say for certain?! Useless worm. Who was it that plucked you filthy urchins off the streets and raised you?”

“...You did, Your Highness.”

“Then don’t utter a word about me even in death... Hmph. Considering that none of the soldiers are coming to me about this incident, it seems nothing was revealed this time.”

As the man said, no one was certain about the identities of Lexia’s assailants.

That was partly because the Goblin General had reduced them to unidentifiable chunks of gore, but more than anything, it was because they hadn’t mentioned a word about their employer to Lexia.

“No doubt the girl will be on guard because of this incident. While Lexia’s strength is irrelevant, the knights who serve her are another matter. Understand?”

“...Yes.”

“This failure is far more costly than you know. If word gets out, my very position could be jeopardized...”

“.....”

“The next mission is key. If you fail that one...then you’ll no longer serve any purpose.”

“I will bear that firmly in mind...”

“Good. You’re dismissed.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

With that, the hooded figure vanished as though melting into the shadows.

The man slumped in his chair and spitefully murmured, “The tainted blood... Your presence is a stain upon the royal family...and an obstacle to me. Next time, I’ll be sure to kill you...”

His remarks were swallowed by the darkness.

Elsewhere, Lexia was resting in her bed within her chambers in the palace.

As Lexia lay there, a middle-aged knight named Owen asked her a question with a look of concern.

“I beg your pardon, Your Highness. How do you feel?”

“Ah, I’m fine.”

They had returned safely to the palace after Lexia had been attacked by a group of mysterious assassins, and while they had reported the incident, the king had been unable to take any major action because they had no concrete leads on the assailants.

“...Are you certain this is all right?”

“...Yes. I don’t want to worry Father any further. I’m alive. That will have to be enough.”

Owen sensed it was useless to continue this line of inquiry, so he decided to inquire about something else that had been on his mind.

“Your Highness, can you tell me what actually happened in the

Weald?”

“I briefly recounted what happened when I woke up, but there’s nothing that identified who attacked me. And it was the Goblin General that killed that group...”

“That’s what’s odd. When we arrived, there was no sign of the Goblin General. Based on the circumstances, I can’t possibly imagine it just happened to let you go, Your Highness...”

“Well, that’s...”

Lexia paused as she remembered in mid-sentence.

Her memory had been jumbled because of the shock and fatigue following the traumatic encounter with the Goblin General, but then she suddenly remembered the sight of a young man.

“Oh, now that I think on it...! A man saved me!”

“A man?”

Owen was openly curious.

“Yes. He was about my age.”

“Are you sure, Your Highness?! Does that mean he defeated a Goblin General despite only recently coming of age...?”

Owen was genuinely shocked by Lexia’s claims.

Even Owen could barely handle a Goblin Elite by himself. He couldn’t even imagine going after the far more powerful Goblin General without enormous amounts of help.

Further, Owen was a powerful warrior renowned not only in the Arselian Kingdom, but even among the neighboring countries.

Unlike in Japan, fifteen was the age of majority in this region, and Owen couldn’t believe that there could be someone who was much more powerful than him at such a young age.

But Lexia was well aware of how ridiculous her own words sounded, which was why she immediately discarded the possibility despite what her own memory was telling her had happened.

“B-but I might have been mistaken, or maybe it was an illusion I saw in the depths of my despair.”

“No, that doesn’t seem likely.”

“Huh?”

Lexia couldn’t help but be confused. She hadn’t expected Owen to be the one to deny those possibilities.

“When we homed in on your location, Your Highness, there were signs of another near you. But by the time we arrived, that presence had disappeared without a trace, which was why I thought I had imagined it at first...”

“Th-then he really...”

“Yes. I don’t know who he might be, but he most certainly exists. So what did he look like?”

“Um... He had beautiful raven-black hair and eyes... And I’m not

sure how to describe it, but he looked like a foreign noble.”

“Black hair and black eyes. Yes, that’s a rare combination in the Arselian Kingdom... But it might be troublesome if he turns out to be a noble of another kingdom.”

“Really? Why?”

“...Since we have no other information, it does us no good to speculate. All that I do know is that while the young man concealed his presence for reasons known only to himself, he seems to have no hostile or malicious intent, so there’s probably no need to worry too much about him.”

Owen certainly didn’t want any more people after Lexia’s life.

However, considering that the man in question hadn’t killed Lexia when she was at her most vulnerable, he thought it foolish to consider him an enemy out of hand, and he swore to himself that he would keep an eye out for this stranger like he did the other nobles.

Completely oblivious to Owen’s resolve, Lexia gazed out the window and let out a sigh.

“I wonder who he was... If only I could see him again...”

Lexia sighed softly once more.

“He saved my life, after all. It’s only natural for me to thank him properly!”

“Wha—?!”

Owen reacted strongly to Lexia’s words in spite of himself and couldn’t shake the feeling that he was about to regret this conversation.

And he was right.

“All right, I’ve decided! Let’s return to the Weald! That way, we might be able to see him again!”

“Y-Your Highness! That’s dangerous! You might be attacked again...”

“We’ll be fine. We’re going to the Weald, after all. No one would dare follow us.”

“The biggest problem is the Weald itself! You just experienced firsthand just how dangerous it can be!”

“Yes. But it should be fine as long as you’re also there, no?”

“The Weald is dangerous, even for me! Besides, what would His Majesty say?”

Owen was strong by most standards, but whether he was strong enough to survive in the Weald was a different story.

The fact was that while he could handle a Goblin Elite, a Goblin General was most likely beyond his ability.

More than anything, he couldn’t imagine that the king would let his beloved daughter, who had just survived an assassination attempt, wander off into such a dangerous place.

“That’s fine! I’ll convince him! Besides, for a royal to not even thank someone for saving their life... I want to meet him and thank him directly!”

“B-but, Your Highness...!”

“It’s already decided. So now that it’s settled, let’s go talk to Father!”

“P-please wait, Your Highness!”

In the end, Owen wasn’t able to stop Lexia, and Lexia went to get the direct approval from her father, the king.

As matters progressed without Yuuya’s knowledge, Japanese society was roiling with rumors about a certain person.

“Hey, did you see this month’s *CutieBeauty*?!”

“I saw it! Who is that boy next to Miu?!”

“Evidently, he’s just a regular guy, but...isn’t he super hot?!”

The fashion magazine featuring the photos from Yuuya’s and Miu’s photo shoot had just hit shelves.

It sold well because this issue featured shots of Miu, a rising star in the modeling world who was very popular with young women. But those ardent fans had become infatuated with Yuuya, who featured very prominently next to Miu in the photos.

“I think they shot these in a nearby shopping mall... Does that mean he lives around here?!”

“He looks around our age... Maybe he’s a high schooler?”

“You think? The girls at his school must be so lucky!”

“I’m totally a fan of his now...”

“How could you not be after seeing that smile?! And this photographer is super good!”

Of course, not all of the readers were unfamiliar with Yuuya. There were those who already knew him.

“Wait... Isn’t this Yuuya?!”

“No way!”

“That’s the transfer student everyone’s talking about?”

“Yeah, yeah! He’s in my class, and he’s amaaazing! He was so cool in gym class the other day!”

“Oooh, tell me more!”

“To think someone this handsome actually exists... Honestly, he’s even better-looking than most idols or actors on TV, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, I agree!”

“It’s no contest!”

Yuuya’s reputation was building among his fellow students at Ousei Academy, but he was also the subject of discussion elsewhere—

“—Miu!”

“Oh, Hikaru! Good morning.”

“Morning. The issue featuring the photos you took with Yuuya is

just flying off the shelves. Apparently, we're getting slammed with orders for more!"

"Huh?! R-really?!"

Miu and Hikaru were also now talking about him.

"Mm-hmm. I've been a photographer for quite some time now, but I can't remember any magazine I shot for selling this well before."

"Wow, Yuuya really is impressive..."

"What are you talking about, darling?! Your popularity's been shooting through the roof, too! The boss was crowing about the sheer amount of work requests coming in..."

"Ah...ha-ha-ha..."

Miu couldn't help but let out an awkward laugh at the thought of their agency's president cackling in delight.

"But Yuuya really is amazing. To stir up the world like this with a single shoot... Whatcha think? Why not take this chance to make him yours, Miu?"

"Whaaa—?! I—I can't do that! I mean, Yuuya is really nice, and he saved me when that other model tried to harass me, but... Considering how cool he is, I'm sure he's already spoken for."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Besides, boys like him are rare. If you see a chance, you should make a move."

Miu tried to muster a reply, but Hikaru walked away without waiting for a response, and she was forced to simply swallow her words.

"Hikaru's always so silly... But if Yuuya really doesn't have a girlfriend—"

While Yuuya remained oblivious, his reputation was growing at a furious rate.

The center of attention himself had no idea what would be waiting for him on his commute to school the next morning.

I've been going to Ousei Academy for a little while now, but for some reason, I feel like people are staring at me more than usual today.

And most of the people looking at me seem to be girls.

"H-hey! Isn't that the guy from the magazine?!"

"Is it just me or does he look even better than the pictures?!"

"R-really?! Hey, that's an Ousei Academy uniform!"

"Oh, we're so blessed. So, so blessed."

There's even people bowing their heads like they're praying in my direction. Is there someone behind me?! Holy crap, this is *weird*!

Then one of the girls suddenly approaches me.

"U-um!"

"Yes?"

"Can I shake your hand?!"

“Excuse me?!”

Sh-shake hands? What? Why?

My mind starts spiraling out of control as the girls who had been watching from afar rush up to join the first girl.

“C-can I shake your hand, too?!”

“Hey, not fair!”

“Would it be all right if I take a picture of you?!”

“Let’s start as friends...!”

Wait, whoa, what the hell is happening?!

Could it be...? Are they confusing me for someone else?

Since I can’t think of any other reason why strangers would want to shake hands with me, I hurriedly decline their requests.

“I—I’m sorry! You’re probably mixing me up with someone else! I—I need to get going!”

“Oh!”

Unnerved after being mobbed by a bunch of strangers without any warning, I race to the academy like I’m a fugitive escaping justice.

But when I get there, I notice a lot of people whispering to each other in the halls as I walk by, and I start getting worried again. What in the world?! ...Maybe my fly’s open?! ...No, come on, be real. No one wants to shake hands with someone who has their fly open.

I arrive at the classroom and take my seat, still completely bewildered. As soon as I sit down, Kaede rushes over to me in a state of nervous excitement.

“Oh, Yuuya, Yuuya! Morning!”

“Good morning. You’re perky today. Something happen?”

“I’m always perky! But never mind that. Look at this!”

“Huh?”

Kaede suddenly places a magazine on my desk.

“Here! This page! That’s you next to Miu, right, Yuuya?!”

“Oh yeah. It’s finally out...”

A picture from my shopping mall photo shoot with Miu is on the cover.

...Hold on... When was this picture taken?

The cover is a picture of Miu and me chatting on a bench.

But I don’t remember taking a picture like this when Hikaru was giving us directions on posing... Oh.

I guess he must have taken it when I was talking to Miu about working as a model... So *that’s* why we wrapped up the shoot right after that break.

Well...I’m smiling naturally in this picture, so I suppose in the end, everything worked out for the best?

There’s more pictures from the shoot in the magazine, but the bench photo is the centerfold for this issue.

I flip through the magazine while sorting out things in my head, when Kaede lets out a soft sigh.

“*Siiigh*... So that really is you, huh? This picture is just amazing.”

“Really? Thanks. But that’s because the photographer is really good at his job. And Miu’s powerful...”

“No, no, no! You’re just as impressive as Miu in this picture, Yuuya!”

Kaede says that now, but if she had been at the shoot, she’d know the truth. I still remember how stiff and awkward my face and body language had been.

Then Kaede suddenly puffs out her cheeks.

“But you know, aren’t you a little too close to her here?”

“Huh?”

The picture Kaede’s pointing at is the one where Miu’s hooked her arms around my shoulders.

“I know it’s technically for work, but...are you two dating?”

“Whaaa—?! N-no, of course not!”

“Mm... Gotcha... You’re not dating just yet...”

“?”

Kaede seems to relax when I immediately deny it.

As I’m talking to Kaede, I can feel more eyes gathering on me.

“Look, it’s Yuuya!”

“The pictures are great, but seeing him in the flesh is better.”

“*Sigh*... I knew he was cool, but I didn’t think he was so hot that he can hold his own next to the super-popular Miu...”

“But Yuuya’s super nice, and for some reason, it’s really heartwarming to see him getting closer with Ryou and the others.”

“Details! I need details!”

“Huh? What? You’re scaring me a little...”

Lots of people are looking over at me now. Is it because they’ve also seen the magazine?

Ah, that would explain all those people who were trying to shake my hand on my way here. They must also be readers of the magazine.

Still, is this a normal reaction to being in a single photo shoot? I’m not a supermodel like Miu... Miu’s the one they should want to shake hands with, right?

As Kaede and I chat, Ryou and Shingo arrive. The moment they see me, both of them rush over.

“Hey, Yuuya! You’re all the rage right now!”

“What do you mean?”

“They’re talking about you on TV!”

“They’re *what*?”

I can’t help but let out a soft squeak at Ryou’s news.

Me...on TV?

“Oh, come on, you don’t really expect me to believe that. I don’t remember being on TV...”

“I-it’s true. Everyone wants to find out who’s the guy in the picture with Miu, the rising star of the fashion world.”

“...Seriously?”

“Yup, dead serious. Look.”

Ryou shows me a clip from a news program with his phone.

“—*So just who is the mystery man in the picture next to Miu?*”

“*He’s like a supernova that’s suddenly exploded on the scene.*”

“*Yes, his good looks are one thing, but he practically oozes charisma even in these photos! He’s a bit different from pop idols and actors, but that sort of élan isn’t something just anyone can bring out. It’s almost impossible to believe that he’s not even a newcomer, but a complete amateur!*”

“*And to think that he hasn’t been picked up until now!*”

“*I’m told that people in various industries are already looking forward to his inevitable debut.*”

“*How remarkable!*”

I stare in open-mouthed shock at the clip.

Is...this really about me? Not someone else?

“...Based on your reaction, looks like you’re the last person to know, eh...?”

“Is that even possible?” Kaede asks.

“B-but look, Yuuya’s completely frozen in shock...,” Shingo points out.

I can’t keep up with all these revelations. Then I think back to what happened this morning.

“...Oh, that’s why everyone was looking at me this morning and tried to ask me to do things...”

The pieces are falling into place. I knew something was strange.

It’s not like I think the magazine isn’t popular or anything, but I don’t think most print publications could cause this much of a stir.

But it’s a different thing entirely if they’re showing me on TV.

I’m still staring blankly at Ryou’s phone when Kaede excitedly says, “This is unbelievable! You’re all the girls are talking about right now, Yuuya!”

“What? Why? ...I mean, there’s gotta be other people like idols or something who are working really hard to get in the news like this. People should talk about them instead of a nobody like me...”

The moment I say that, the other three look like my reaction took them by complete surprise.

“Huh? What’s wrong?”

“U-um...Yuuya? Are you serious?” Shingo asks incredulously.

“Well, yeah.”

Hikaru's skills are the real deal. He made me look so cool in not just the bench picture, but all the other photos as well.

"Y-Yuuya... Y-you have a really low opinion of yourself, don't you?"

"No? I think it's right about where it should be..."

Like everyone else says, I also think I look better now. But I still can't bring myself to like myself.

Even if I look different, my old appearance is still seared into my brain, and I can't even count the number of times I wanted to be rid of that body.

The fact that my siblings, Youta and Sora, are so good-looking in comparison only made me hate myself all the more.

For a whole slew of reasons, I don't really like myself all that much.

...That said, I don't completely hate myself anymore. I think I've made some progress in that department, but it's mainly thanks to the fact that I gained levels in the other world.

It's one thing to slowly build up my confidence, but I literally can't believe all the praise that's being heaped on me. There's no way I'd just suddenly start being proud of myself.

As those dark emotions seep onto my face, Ryou looks at me with a serious expression.

"Yuuya. I don't know what you faced in the past, but you need to start learning to accept who you are."

"Huh?"

"It's okay for you to have more confidence, man!"

"...Really? Should I?"

"Of course! Right?"

"I mean, I don't quite get it, but... Yeah, why not?" Kaede heartily agrees.

"Don't say that if you don't get it..."

"Ryou, don't nitpick!"

"I'll help you, too. I understand what it's like to not have any confidence in yourself," Shingo assures me.

...This academy really is full of good people.

My heart feels so warm here.

CHAPTER 7

One Small Step

“.....”

During class, I find my mind and gaze wandering, and I look out the window blankly.

I'm thinking about what Ryou and the others said to me this morning.

...I can be confident. Hmm...

I listen blankly to the teacher's lecture as I mechanically copy down the contents of the blackboard into my notebook.

...This is no good. I'm in class, so I should be paying attention, but...I just can't focus on the lecture.

As I stare blankly out the window, I spot another class having gym outdoors. When I look closer, I notice Kaori's down there.

While I idly watch the gym class unfold below, my eyes meet Kaori's, and she lightly waves at me.

I can't help but return the wave. Remembering that class is still in session, I try to turn my attention back to the blackboard, when suddenly...

“—Excuse me, who are you people?!”

...there's a stir on the school grounds.

The commotion is loud enough that it reaches the classroom, bringing the rest of the class's attention to the windows.

“What's going on?”

“Did something happen?”

We all look out the window and spot a bunch of crudely dressed men riding around the field on motorcycles. There's at least several dozen of them.

Each motorcycle has two riders, and they're all brandishing spiked bats and other menacing weapons in their hands.

The students on the field fly into a panic, while the teacher is desperately trying to maintain some sense of calm. Unfortunately,

before they can do anything, the men on bikes surround them all.

“Who are you people?!”

“Shut it!”

The gym teacher comes forward and tries to yell a warning, when one of the bikers swings a bat at him without hesitation. As expected, the gym teacher is fairly athletic, and he manages to avoid the attack.

At this point, several teachers emerge from the office.

“Study among yourselves for now.”

With that, our teacher also hurriedly leaves the classroom.

Of course, the events transpiring outside have our full attention, and everyone clusters around the windows.

“What?! What’s happening?!”

“Huh? That symbol, I’ve seen it somewhere before...”

“Wait, isn’t that the symbol of the Red Ogres?!”

“Red Ogres?!”

I flinch at the mention of that name.

That’s because the person who bullied me at my last school, Araki, belongs to that group.

Wait... Why are the Red Ogres here?!

I stare in shock as the teachers try to reason with the gang members on the field. Then I notice two familiar faces among them.

“Wha...? Youta...Sora...?”

I spot my brother and sister smiling as they stand behind the gang members.

When I take a closer look, I also see Araki and his cadre of lackeys, who had been my chief tormentors.

My shock deepens as any chance of grasping what’s going on completely escapes me.

Meanwhile, despite being surrounded by gang members, Kaori speaks up in a crisp, undaunted tone and demands, “What brings you to our academy? I’m afraid my father isn’t here...”

“Oh, you want to know why?! To teach you a lesson, of course!”

The one who answers Kaori isn’t one of the gang members, but Youta.

“You’re...”

“Ahhh, so you remember us, hmm? I figured you elites would forget about lowly peons like us. But if you remember, then you know exactly why we’re here, yes?”

“...What do you think you’re going to accomplish? The police will be here shortly. Why are you...?”

“But you can’t do anything until they arrive, right? There’s more of us than your teachers, and...more than anything, we have you and your classmates as hostages.”

“Ah!”

As Youta pointed out, there's only a dozen or so teachers in total, and they can't possibly handle all of the Red Ogres by themselves.

Youta sneers as the teachers and Kaori realize there's little they can do to stop them.

A particularly muscular member of the gang calls over to Youta.

"Hey, Youta, can we get this show going? Dealing with the cops will be a pain. If you're after that girl, we can just nab her, yeah?"

"Yes... While I would have liked to deal with our pig of a brother, we'll have to settle. Let's just take her with us and get going."

"Whoo-hoo! Time for a party!"

"Ah!"

The man grins maliciously and closes on Kaori, clearly intending to grab her.

The teachers try to stop him, but the other gang members bar the way. The rest of the bikers make threatening gestures to the other students, warning them about interfering.

"Wait! They can't do that!"

"B-but what can we do...?"

Ryou and the other students seem to realize the situation is bad, but the gang members are too threatening for anyone to make any overt moves.

I'm... Honestly, I'm also afraid.

I'm having flashbacks of all the bullying I was subjected to, and my body's trembling uncontrollably.

But even as I quiver, the gang members are closing in on Kaori.

"I...I..."

"? Hey, Yuuya... You okay?"

"You don't look so good."

"M-maybe you should go to the infirmary?"

Ryou, Kaede, and Shingo look concerned when they see me trembling like a leaf.

For them to worry about me when I'm standing here, terrified to my core...

If I stay like this, it'll be like nothing ever changed...

Then I suddenly remember Ryou's words from this morning.

...I still can't bring myself to have confidence in my own worth right now. If anything, it's that I don't want to have that confidence.

Even though Kaori's about to be kidnapped right in front of me, I'm too frightened to move.

What would Gramps say if he saw me now?

The first time I met Kaori, I spoke up despite my fear.

Back then, I wasn't able to do anything cool to save her, and the people accosting her gave me a real good thrashing.

But...at least I was a better man, a better person, then.

Despite the fact that my body's stronger, my heart's grown weaker... No, if that's true, I'll never be able to face Gramps or that other world...and most importantly, I won't be able to face who I used to be.

I can't become confident overnight, but...one day, I'd like to be able to have pride in who I am...!

Then what should I do?!

That's easy—

“Huh?! Yuuya?!”

“Waitwaitwaitwait!”

Next thing I know, my body moves on its own.

I step onto the windowsill and jump.

“Whaaaaaat?! The hell are you doing?!” Ryou shouts.

“Yuuya! We're on the fourth floor!” Kaede can't believe what she's seeing.

I'm sure everyone's eyes are ready to pop out of their heads.

But a moment later, I land safely after leaping from the fourth-story window.

“You okay?! Yuuya!”

“I'm fine!”

“Oh good... Wait, no, not good! What were you thinking?!”

“I'll be right back after I stop them.”

“You say that like you're grabbing something at the corner store!”

I feel a little bad for my classmates, but I head straight to Kaori and the others.

“—Youta, Sora...!”

“Y-Yuuya?!”

“...Damned pig.”

“Oh, you saved us the trouble of finding you.”

The teachers, Kaori, Youta, and the gang members are all surprised by my arrival.

Quickly recovering, Araki smirks and asks, “Hey, Youta, can I take care of the lardass?”

“Of course. Give him a proper beating, then let's drag him away with this bitch.”

“Heh-heh-heh... Been a while, hasn't it, lardass? I'll mess up that irritating face of yours and make it look like how it used to be.”

“.....”

With that, Araki and his cronies surround me.

They all have metal bats and wooden swords in their hands.

...In the past, I would have been quivering in my boots by now, knowing that I'd be beaten to a pulp without putting up any real resistance.

But I've changed after leveling up in the other world.

Araki and his underlings don't scare me. I can save Kaori and the others...

"All right...batter up...!"

Araki takes a full swing, no trace of hesitation despite the fact that he's wielding a metal bat.

The teachers and students nearby let out shrieks as they watch.

But my mind is dominated by only one thought when I see him move.

...H-huh? H-he's really slow.

Despite the fact that I just steeled my resolve for a serious fight, I can't help but stare blankly at the attack.

Oh, that's right. The model who attacked me during my shoot with Miu was supposedly a former boxer, but he didn't seem very strong at all.

I mean, he's not even remotely comparable to the monsters I encountered in the other world.

Even though this is a much more concerning situation than when I handled the aggressive model, I still don't find Araki's attack very threatening.

Um... I'll probably be fine even if this attack lands, but everyone else probably would misunderstand, so...probably not a good idea to just take it in the face.

"Ah well."

"Eh?!"

I simply move to the side and avoid the swing. Araki, evidently not expecting me to dodge his attack, immediately furrows his brow in irritation.

"You son of a... Why're you scurrying around even though you're a pig?!"

"W-well, I didn't want you to hit me..."

"You what?! Stop screwing with me... You just got lucky. I'm gonna wipe that smug look off your face...!"

With that, Araki starts wildly swinging his metal bat around, but none of his attacks come even close to hitting me.

It's not like he's got overwhelming power like the Goblin General, nor does he have years of combat experience.

There's no way any of his random flailing is going to connect.

"Dammit, dammit, dammit! Stop dodging, you asshole!"

"A-Araki? Come on, everybody, get in there!"

The other delinquents look a little shaken when they see Araki struggle to land a hit, and they quickly decide to join in all at once. Even with more of them attacking together, though, none of them can touch me.

It's not like the other delinquents have any special training or

superhuman stats.

No, even worse...

“Raaah!”

“Guh?!”

“A-Araki! The hell are you doing?!”

“Wha—? I-it’s his fault for getting too close!”

They’re hitting each other.

I tried positioning myself so that they’d hit each other, but I didn’t expect it to work this well. This kind of tactic might be useful in the other world, too.

I no longer feel the slightest bit of fear when I look at Araki and the others, who are clumsily missing again and again.

With my deep-rooted fear gone, all I have to do is what I normally do in the other world—use my surroundings to my advantage. And it just so happens that I’m currently surrounded by gang members.

The muscular man who was trying to kidnap Kaori lets out an angry shout as he sees Araki and his crew hit each other or slow down from fatigue.

“The hell are you idiots doing?! Screw it... Hey! You! Go get him!”

“You got it, boss.”

The man who shoves Araki aside to come after me almost looks like a sumo wrestler.

He’s got dreadlocks and a lot of piercings, and he’s much, much bigger than any of the other gang members.

“Ha-ha-ha! This guy got banned from the sumo world because he was too violent... Hey, hurry up and kick this guy’s ass!”

“Looks like you’re out of luck. Sorry, buddy. Time to go to sleep!”

The giant ex-sumo wrestler thrusts an open palm at me.

However...

“Aha.”

“Wha—?!”

I grab his wrist and completely stop his hand from moving.

“Y-you little!”

After seeing his full-strength attack get stopped, he uses his free hand to strike.

In response, I let go of his wrist and deflect his new thrust as well.

“Hyah!”

“Guh!”

I only lightly sweep his arm aside, but because of the overwhelming gap in our stats, my opponent takes more damage than I expected.

“Y-you son of a...!”

After getting knocked back when I diverted his arm, the giant man glares at me in rage and charges at me.

If this giant were fighting a normal person, a tackle with all his

weight behind it would throw his opponent far back.

Or he might even knock them to the ground and then mount them before beating them to a pulp.

But against me, even when he lands a clean tackle, he can't move me a single centimeter.

"Hey! What are you doing?! Stop playing around and kill him!"

"Y-yes, boss! ...Grrrah?! Why won't you move...?!"

He's pushing as hard as he can, but I don't budge even a little.

...Wow. I didn't think I'd end up being able to completely neutralize a normal person's strength after fighting a Devil Bear and a Goblin General.

That causal thought crosses my mind as the giant desperately tries to shove me aside.

Still, I can't just leave things like this, so I grab his torso with both hands and lift him off the ground.

"Ha!"

"Ahhhhh?!"

I'm easily able to raise him up into the air.

He's lighter than I expected, so I try holding him up with one hand, and he doesn't feel any heavier.

Because he's so light, I can't help but want to toss him up and down like a ball.

"Graaah?!"

As I bounce the giant against my hand, he lets out a scream of shock at the sheer impossibility of the situation.

"What's going on with my muscles...?"

"H-heeeeeellp!"

"Oops."

"Gaaaaaaaah?!"

As the giant squirms to escape, I lose control of him and accidentally toss him far off into the distance.

The giant lands flat on the ground after falling from a remarkable height. He's out cold.

Everyone stares in mute shock. Hey, I'm surprised, too, okay?

I mean, sure, I sensed that I had gotten stronger, but I didn't realize I'd become practically superhuman by Earth standards...

It shouldn't be possible to toss a person like they're a baseball.

But despite this newfound strength of mine, the other world is home to creatures that can handily beat me in a test of pure strength. That's a scary thought. I need to get stronger.

As I open and close my hand to check how it feels, the muscular biker recovers from his shock and shouts in a faint panic:

"Y-you bastards! Take care of him before you handle the teachers!"

""O-okay!""

“Hrm...”

The other gang members who had been busy intimidating the teachers all gather around me.

...I can't actively attack any of these guys, can I? I mean, given what happened with the giant... Plus, more than anything, I really don't want to be the one hauled away by the police. Then again, maybe that ship has sailed.

In any case, I'm going to let them take each other out.

“Guh?!”

“Hey, out of the way!”

“No, you're the one in the—oomph?!”

I carefully position myself between the gang members and avoid their attacks at the last second, slowly whittling them down.

But as their numbers dwindle, they naturally stop hitting each other. Guess it's time for me to act.

“—! Dammit! Get back, you idiots! I'll deal with him!”

Finally out of patience, the brawny man who's probably the leader of the group heads straight for me.

“You bastard... You'll regret screwing with the Red Ogres! I'm going to murder you. Screw my agreement with Youta...!”

He's got spiky blond hair and a ton of piercings, just like the giant. There's a tattoo of what looks like a roaring fire on his right arm, and the black jacket he's wearing has a giant red ogre emblazoned on its back.

He cracks his knuckles and makes some threats before throwing a punch at my face.

“Rah!”

“Hyah!”

I use my palm to deflect his fist.

“Tch... You little...!”

But he's still the leader of this gang, and he follows up with a combination attack that's much faster than any of his underlings could manage.

I can tell each blow would do a number on a regular person.

But I deflect all of them with my palm.

“Dammit... Are you some martial artist?!”

I actually haven't taken any real lessons, and I learned my fighting techniques by reading books I bought at a used bookstore plus practicing what I read in the other world, but I doubt this man would believe me even if I told him the truth. Not that I need to explain anything to him.

“Goddammit, go down already...!”

Having repeatedly tried combinations of punches, the gang leader suddenly unleashes a sharp kick at my forehead.

Right as I avoid the kick, I realize something.

...The monsters in the other world fight on instinct, but going at it with people works completely differently.

While instinctive attacks can be hard to read, this guy's mixing in feints, and he's using tactics that only a person would think of.

After watching him carefully, I realize that this man's probably got some martial arts training of his own.

Since I don't have much experience fighting anything besides monsters, I'm actually learning how to fight people from him.

Among the martial arts books I bought at the used bookstore, several of them noted that encounters against fighters who use other styles is an opportunity to steal their techniques. While I may end up never using them, I decide to actively study the gang leader's movements.

"Wh-what the—?!"

The gang leader seems to notice that I'm watching him closely, and he ramps up the ferocity of his attacks, adding grapples to his punches and kicks.

But I foil all of them without so much as a scratch, burning his movements into my memory all the while.

"You son of a bitch!"

It's finally dawned on him that he can't beat me with standard tactics, so the gang leader reaches down and grabs a handful of dirt, throwing it at my face.

That momentarily robs me of my sight, and while it's only for a split second, I leave an opening for him to exploit.

"Diiiiie!"

The gang leader doesn't miss that golden opportunity, and he unleashes his sharpest kick yet directly at my face.

My body reacts instinctively, taking a stance to divert the force of his kick before throwing him across my back.

"Graaagh?!"

He slams into the ground.

Without giving him any time to react, I quickly twist the man's arm behind his back like I did with the model and pin him down.

"Urgh?! G-get off me!"

I have a secure grip on the gang leader's arm, and even though he tries desperately to squirm out of my hold, it's useless.

That's when the police arrive on the scene. They quickly begin capturing the other gang members with the teachers' assistance.

"D-dammit! Let go!"

"You assholes!"

The gang members are defiant to the end, even as the police grab a hold of them.

I hand over the gang leader to an officer who promptly leads him away in restraints.

“Th-this can’t be happening... The Red Ogres...”

The twins go pale as they watch the gang members getting led off one after another.

With almost all of the gang members in restraints, I figure everything is about finished...

“Dammit, dammit, dammit... Youta! It’s your damned fault...!”

“Ahhh?!”

The Red Ogre gang leader forces his way out of his restraints with brute strength and charges straight at Youta.

Youta’s frozen in place, rattled by the sheer rage directed at him, and the gang leader easily grabs him by the collar.

“If you didn’t put us up to this, none of this would have happened...! I’m going to take you down if it’s the last thing I do...”

“S-stop...!”

“H-hang on! Let go of Youta!”

“Shut it! You’re just as guilty!”

“Aaah!”

Sora tries to stand up to the gang leader, but his violent demeanor is enough to force her back.

The gang leader then stares at Youta with bloodshot eyes.

“It’s over. I’m going to strangle you and then do the same to this bitch!”

“Ahhhhh! Noooo! Noooo! S-someone! Someone help! H-help me...!”

Youta’s voice breaks into a panicked sob, his face streaming with tears as the muscular man wraps his hands around Youta’s throat.

The police try to stop him, but the other gang members resume their struggle even in their restraints, and there’s not enough police officers to deal with the situation.

Just as the man is about to strangle Youta, I react before I realize it.

“Let go.”

“Eh?!”

“B-Big...Brother...?”

I grab the man’s arm and peel his hand from Youta’s throat.

“Grrr?! H-how strong can you be?!”

The gang leader desperately tries to fight back, but he stands no chance against me, and I pull him away from Youta.

Once I’ve dragged him away from Youta, I finally let go of his arm.

“Gasp! Wheeze!”

“...You okay?”

I rub Youta’s back as he desperately sucks in air.

Youta stares at me in shock and murmurs, “Wh-why...? Why did you...?”

“Why...? I mean, you’re my brother.”

“Wha—?!”



My words seem to come as a shock to Youta.

“You son of a bitch! Don’t get in my way!”

The gang leader ignores our exchange and charges at us in a final attempt to kill Youta.

But—

“...I can’t bring myself to abandon family.”

“Wha—?! Guh!”

I close with the man and aim a kick at his undefended stomach.

Although I’m holding back, my stats make the blow a powerful one, and the kick lifts the gang leader off the ground. I follow up with a roundhouse kick in the air.

The gang leader flies several meters away, and when he lands, he’s out cold.

“.....”

Everyone goes silent.

Then—

“Whooooaaaa!”

—a cheer erupts from the school building.

“Amazing!”

“What was that?! That was insane!”

“Hell, the gang members didn’t even lay a finger on him!”

“I figured he was athletic after that gym class, but this is... unbelievable!”

“That’s the first time I’ve ever seen someone get sent flying like that!”

The students who had been watching the incident from the windows begin chattering all at once.

As I’m watching them, Kaori runs over to me.

“Yuuya! Are you all right?!”

“Oh? Yeah. I’m fine. But what about you? Are you okay, Kaori?”

“Huh? Oh, y-yes! I’m fine!”

I give Kaori a once-over, but it seems like she’s unhurt.

Thank goodness... Looks like I won’t have to regret not acting soon enough...

As heartfelt relief floods me, it seems whatever tension that’s been keeping Kaori going also snaps, and she almost collapses.

I hurriedly prop her up, and she chuckles shyly.

“You okay?!” Anyone would be worried.

“Eh-heh-heh, my apologies... When the sense of relief hit me, all the strength just left my body.”

“Big Brother...”

Youta and Sora approach us with gloomy expressions as Kaori and I are chatting.

When she sees them, Kaori tries to stand up and shield me, but I

stop her.

“Yuuya?” she asks.

“It’s okay.”

I smile reassuringly at Kaori, then turn to face the twins.

“Big Brother...why did you...? All I’ve ever done is torment you...”

“...That’s true. It made my life hard. I can’t count the number of times I almost broke, watching the two of you do everything better than I could. But still... When my family’s in trouble, I can’t stand by and do nothing... I couldn’t help but feel that way.”

I’m sure some people will look at me and think I’m a hopeless pushover or naive.

Considering everything my brother and sister have done to me, it makes a lot of sense to not offer them a helping hand.

I can’t forgive them for the way they mocked Gramps, and when I think about our past...I admit there’s a lot of dark emotions welling up inside me.

But even then...

No matter how much everyone around me might say I’m too soft, this is who I am.

The next thing I notice is Youta’s eyes going wide as tears begin coursing down his cheeks.

“I...I...! I’m sorry... I’m so, so sorry...!”

Youta sobs, and Sora also begins to cry. Then the police officers come to take them away.

As I watch them go, Kaori asks a gentle question.

“...Are you sure?”

“Hmm?”

“Those two did terrible things to you, Yuuya... So...”

“...Yeah. I know. There’s a lot of history between us. And I still haven’t forgiven them.”

“.....”

“But... It’s fine. This is who I am.”

“Ah... Yes, that’s true.”

A look of surprise flashes on Kaori’s face briefly, as though my words resonate deeply with her. A moment later, she breaks out in a smile.

Then I notice a hint of mischievousness creep into that smile.

“That reminds me... You’ve saved me once again.”

“Huh? Ohhh... Was I able to save you properly this time?”

“Not just this time. You saved me last time, too. You’re my hero after all, Yuuya.”

I blush at Kaori’s words, and I can’t help but think from the bottom of my heart...thank goodness I acted.

The police and the teachers quickly took care of everything else afterward.

All of the gang members were arrested and taken to the police station.

It seems that this incident was triggered by the fact that Youta and Sora learned they wouldn't be admitted to Ousei Academy.

The Red Ogres, Araki included, had a laundry list of offenses and infractions, so all their student members were ultimately expelled from their schools and sent to juvenile facilities. Given that Kaori was somewhat involved with the twins and why they acted out in this incident, my brother and sister were able to narrowly escape expulsion. That said, this will undoubtedly be a major black mark on their school records.

Things really got out of hand, but thanks to the principal, there wasn't much trouble with the media.

Oh, as for the principal, he just happened to be away from the academy when everything went down, but he hurried back as soon as he heard what had happened. As expected, he heaped praise on me for saving his daughter a second time.

He said he would thank me in some way, but I'm just grateful to be able to attend this academy... But I also couldn't really tell him no.

In the end, everything was resolved without anyone getting badly hurt, but... One day later, I'm still a little scared to go to school.

Whatever the reason, I ended up kicking and throwing people like rag dolls.

Just the thought that all my wonderful classmates might look at me with fear... It scares the hell out of me.

As I'm pondering that possibility, I reach the classroom.

I open the door, sick with worry and—

"Hey, Yuuya! We were really worried about you yesterday."

Ryou is the first one to greet me. Kaede is hot on his heels.

"Yuuya! Are you hurt anywhere? You okay?"

"J-just watching you made me nervous...", Shingo adds.

"Eh? Huh?"

I find myself at a loss for words as everyone suddenly swarms me.

The moment I enter the room, all my classmates look at me with smiles on their faces.

"Yuuya, you were amazing yesterday!"

"To take on that many gang members and emerge unscathed... It's crazy!"

"That reminds me, didn't you lift that giant guy with one hand?! How did you do that?!"

"Also, is it just me, or did you jump down from the fourth floor?! Are you sure you're okay?!"

“Yuuya! Please join the aikido club!”

“No, no, the judo club!”

“What are you talking about? Didn’t you see his kicks?! He should come to the tae kwon do club!”

Everyone welcomes me back with warmth and affection.

It almost seems stupid now to think that they’d be afraid of me. No, it’s just that they’re all so much kinder than even I could have imagined.

I’ve never experienced anything like this before leveling up in the other world.

I’d assumed that the other world was my only relief from all my problems, but...that’s not true at all.

Thanks to the fact that I gained levels, I was able to meet so many amazing people.

“Thanks, everyone!”

—Leveling up has changed my life.

Epilogue

—In an office building somewhere in the city...

“I finally found you...Yuuya Tenjou...!”

...a woman cracked a shameless smile as she stared down at the various photographs of Yuuya covering her desk.

“There’s no way I can let a talent like this slip between my fingers, is there?” The woman murmured to herself as she stood up and called over to one of her subordinates. “Kurosawa!”

“Yes, ma’am?”

“Here’s a job for you. Make contact with this young man here.”

“I’m on it, ma’am.”

As she watched her employee leave her office, the woman’s smile widened.

“He’ll be mine, whatever it takes...!”

The other two people in the room—Hikaru and Miu—looked troubled as they watched the woman at her desk.

Hikaru and Miu had both tried their best to keep Yuuya’s identity a secret, but that didn’t last long under their boss’s intense scrutiny.

“What are you going to do...when you find Yuuya?”

“What do you mean, Hikaru? I’m going to sign him, obviously. With Miu the rising star and Yuuya the wunderkind, the possibilities for growth are endless!”

“But...you need to consider Yuuya’s feelings...”

While she remained reserved and tactful, Miu firmly stated her opinion, prompting the woman to quirk a brow in surprise.

“What a strange thing to say. It’s a chance to become a celebrity. There’s no way anyone would turn that down.”

As the woman brimmed with unshakable confidence, even Hikaru had no reply. He and Miu simply stared at their boss in silence.

“Heh-heh-heh... Yuuya Tenjou...it won’t be long before I lay my own eyes on you...”

In a completely different place—in completely different world, in fact—even as one agency owner was attempting to track down Yuuya, there was an odd rumor circulating in the Arselian Kingdom.

“Hey, did you hear?”

“About Princess Lexia, right?”

“Yeah. Apparently something happened during her recent fact-finding tour, and it seems she’s going to the Weald.”

“That’s strange. I mean, not even adventurers venture in there. That place has got nothing but powerful monsters. It’s not like there’s any rare magic herbs growing there or anything...”

“Word is there’s someone living out there and that Her Highness wants to meet with him.”

“Say what?! Someone *lives* there?! Wait, why would she want to meet them anyway?”

“Beats me, but...if someone really does live there, they can’t right in the head.”

Yuuya remained oblivious as rumors about him continued to spread.

“All right, time to head to that world again.”

A few days after the incident with the twins, I decide to go to the other world for the first time in a while.

I’ve been steadily exploring more of the forest, but I’ve yet to encounter more native people since my encounter with the Goblin General.

“...Eh, I’ll run into someone eventually.”

As I dream of traveling the world outside of those woods at some point, I finish up lunch and head to the other world.

I’m now challenging monsters that would have easily killed me in the past.

That’s all thanks to my newly acquired strength. I suspect I can still get even stronger, so I’m training to make sure I can survive and thrive in this world.

“Yah!”

“Graaah!”

Which is why, despite the fact that I run into another Bloody Ogre, I purposefully pick a fight with it this time.

I lunge forward with all of my strength, swinging the Omnisword as the ground cracks beneath my step. The Bloody Ogre desperately tries to block my attack, swinging wildly in my direction.

“Yaaaah!”

“Grugaaaaah!”

Unfortunately for the Bloody Ogre, I easily cut through its arm and let the momentum carry me forward, splitting the ogre in half.

I skid to an effortless stop just as the slain monster disappears into

motes of light.

“Phew... Hmm?”

As I’m gathering the Bloody Ogre’s drops, I get a ping from my Detect Presence skill.

No, it’s not a single ping—there’s a whole bunch of them.

“What’s going on?”

I use my One with Nature skill to conceal my presence and move quietly until I reach the source—

“Graaah!”

“Raaagh!”

“Blast! We ran into a group of Goblin Elites...!”

“Just what the hell is up with these woods?! Even one is dangerous enough as it is...!”

“Move your bodies, not your mouths! Protect Her Highness, whatever it takes!”

I’m surprised to find four Goblin Elites and the soldiers I saw in these woods once before duking it out.

A familiar middle-aged knight is facing a Goblin Elite on his own, but the other knights aren’t quite that capable, and while they’re holding the line for the moment, it looks like they’ll be overwhelmed soon.

I don’t know who the soldiers work for, and I don’t know if they’re friends or foes, but I can’t just stand by and watch them die...

Keeping my One with Nature skill activated, I approach one of the Goblin Elites and use the Omnisword to take off its head.

“Huh?!”

“Wh-what just...?”

Though my One with Nature skill deactivates after I attack the Goblin Elite, I pay that no heed as I quickly flow into a lunge, stabbing the second Goblin Elite through the heart.

“Gaaaah!”

One Goblin Elite that’s recovered from its surprise attacks me, but I calmly read its movements and dodge its greatsword by a hairbreadth before stepping close and lopping off its head.

“Wh-whoa...”

“What the hell is going on...?”

“Is that the person Her Highness was talking about?”

I turn my attention to the last one only to see the middle-aged knight finish it off. Seems he didn’t need my help after all.

So...what now?

It’s all fine and good that I saved them, but I don’t know these people very well... And I can see that the soldiers are treating me warily...

It’s hard for me to speak up, and I fall into silent thought as I try to

figure out what to do. That's when the middle-aged knight calls out to me.

"You've saved us. Thank you."

"Huh?! O-oh, no, please don't worry about it. I just happened to be in the area..."

"I see... But to think that you actually exist..."

"Excuse me?"

The middle-aged knight crosses his arms in thought, and the other soldiers begin whispering among themselves.

"H-he's real..."

"So this is the one?"

"He's gotta be. I mean, look at how easily he took out all those Goblin Elites on his own..."

"He doesn't look much older than Princess Lexia..."

"That appearance and bearing... Is he a noble of some sort...?"

"Wha?"

As I'm rendered speechless by the soldiers and their whispers, a girl emerges from between their ranks.

"Oh!"

It's the girl who was being attacked by the Goblin General. Back then, she had been covered with mud, but now she's completely cleaned up. She almost looks like a different person.

When she sees me, she opens her eyes wide—

"U-um!"

"Y-yes?!"

"—Please marry me!"

"...Excuse me?"

—and promptly drops a massive bombshell.

Afterword

I'd like to sincerely thank you for picking up this book.

My name is Miku, and I'm the author of this light novel.

This book started out as fiction I posted to the web novel hosting site *Kakuyomu* and, after winning the website's Modern Fantasy Award, has now made its way to print.

I've added a lot of content for this release, and I believe it's become a much more polished work as a result.

When I was working on this book, I made a great many discoveries about writing that I never noticed before, and I like to think I've grown a bit as a writer.

Currently, I'm in my last year at university, and since I'll be graduating next spring, I'm doing all I can to put myself in a position to achieve my dreams.

Which is why although I try to keep up with updates to the web novel, I just can't find the time anymore, and I'm deeply sorry for disappointing my readers.

I'll do my best to get back up and running and posting new updates.

Finally, I'd like to take this space to thank the various people involved.

To the judges of the *Kakuyomu* Web Novel Contest. I can't describe how happy I was to learn I won an award. Thank you so much for choosing my work.

To my editors. Thank you for guiding me through the bookmaking process and for providing me with the great advice that helped me streamline and refine this book. I've still got a lot to learn about the process, and I know I'll probably need more help from you in the future, so I ask for your continued patience and mentorship.

To Rein Kuwashima. Thank you so much for bringing my characters to life in such cool and cute ways through your illustrations. I was truly moved when I first received your work. I look forward to

collaborating with you more in the future.

And to all of my readers who've read this book. I know there's a lot that still needs work, but I'd like to continue to put in the effort to make things better.

I look forward to seeing you all again.

Miku

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by Yen On.**

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